

SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS THAT LEAD TO LATINO MALE
STUDENTS LEAVING SCHOOL BEFORE GRADUATING

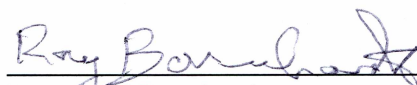
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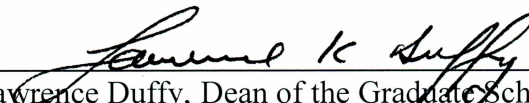


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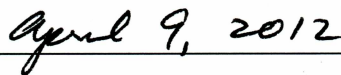
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**SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS THAT LEAD TO LATINO MALE STUDENTS
LEAVING SCHOOL BEFORE GRADUATING**

A
THESIS

Presented to the Faculty
of the University of Alaska Fairbanks

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

By

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Abstract

Students of color make up a predominant number of learners that leave high school before graduating (National Center for Education Research, 2009). I selected to study Latino males to narrow the scope of my research. The literature I reviewed pointed directly at socioeconomics as one of the primary factors. I feel there are more specific factors involved for many of the individuals impacted. I used a qualitative approach and utilized an anonymous survey and individual interviews to pinpoint some of these factors.

The findings from my research further supported that socioeconomics were a leading factor. My data and literature review showed that school environment and stereotyping/discrimination also played a role. I intend to conduct further research to identify the additional sub-factors that are most prevalent to Latino males. My long-term goal is to provide information to my peers that can assist in the construction or reconstruction of programs that can offer the best support for these students.

Table of Contents

	Page
Signature Page.....	i
Title Page.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Figures.....	v
List of Appendices.....	vi
Section 1 Introduction and Rationale	
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Research Questions.....	3
1.3 Rationale.....	6
1.4 Thesis Roadmap.....	9
Section 2 Literature Review	
2.1 Statement of Acknowledgement.....	11
2.2 Theme 1 School Environment.....	11
2.3 Theme 2 Socioeconomics.....	21
2.4 Theme 3 Stereotyping and Discrimination.....	29
Section 3 Methods and Statement of Bias	
3.1 Methods.....	34
3.2 Statement of Bias.....	38
Section 4 Findings and Analysis	
4.1 Research Setting.....	41

4.2 Participant Demographics.....	44
4.3 Theme 1 Socioeconomics.....	47
4.4 Theme 2 School Environment.....	57
4.5 Theme 3 Stereotyping and Discrimination.....	69
Section 5 Conclusions.....	72
References	89

List of Figures

	Page
Figure 1: Response Data Question 1.....	45
Figure 2: Response Data Question 2.....	45
Figure 3: Response Data Question 3.....	46
Figure 4: Response Data Question 4.....	48
Figure 5: Response Data Question 5.....	49
Figure 6: Response Data Question 6.....	50
Figure 7: Response Data Question 7.....	53
Figure 8: Response Data Question 8.....	50
Figure 9: Response Data Question 9.....	51
Figure 10: Response Data Question 10.....	59
Figure 11: Response Data Question 11.....	60
Figure 12: Response Data Question 12.....	61
Figure 13: Response Data Question 13.....	62
Figure 14: Response Data Question 14.....	63
Figure 15: Response Data Question 15.....	64
Figure 16: Response Data Question 16.....	46
Figure 17: Response Data Question 17.....	47
Figure 18: Response Data Question 18.....	64
Figure 19: Response Data Question 19.....	54
Figure 20: Response Data Question 20.....	64

Figure 21: Response Data Question 21.....	55
Figure 22: Response Data Question 22.....	66
Figure 23: Response Data Question 23.....	67
Figure 24: Response Data Question 24.....	68
Figure 25: Response Data Question 25.....	68
Figure 26: Response Data Question 26.....	55
Figure 27: Response Data Question 27.....	57
Figure 28: Response Data Question 28.....	69
Figure 29: Response Data Question 29.....	72
Figure 30: Response Data Question 30.....	72

List of Appendices

	Page
Appendix 1: Survey Questions.....	78
Appendix 2: Interview Questions.....	87
Appendix 3: IRB Approval.....	88

Section 1 Introduction and Rationale

1.1 Introduction

Jose and Fernando¹ have decided to leave before graduating high school. This is a simple statement, but a complex issue. Some people might make the assumption that it is their own fault that they did not graduate. Others might look at these two names and succumb to using stereotypes and assume maybe it is because they could not speak English or that they might simply not be “meant” to go on to college. If you have the opportunity to talk to Jose and Fernando and take the time to listen, you might find that their reasons for having left school before graduating are much more complex. Jose might confide in you that, “Some teachers treated us different and didn’t expect anything from us” (Anonymous, 2012). Fernando might convey to you that, “Sometimes I felt like they group us together in classes just because we were Mexican” (Anonymous, 2012)

Jose and Fernando are not alone. Brown and Rodriguez (2009) spoke of Angel and Ramone who experienced many of the same socioeconomic challenges that Jose and Fernando were burdened with simply because they were Latino² males and because of where they grew up. If you take the time to talk to these young men, you will find out that possibly their school experiences were not the same as yours or in many cases anything like what we would expect for all students in the United States. All students are entitled an excellent, diverse, culturally sensitive education. Not only is it the right thing

¹ Jose and Fernando are aliases for two Latino men who participated in my research interviews.

² Latino – a male person considered part of an ethnic background that is traditionally Spanish-speaking, especially a citizen of, or an immigrant from, a Spanish-speaking country (Wikipedia, 2012).

to provide for them, but the consequences for not providing it affect every person in the United States whether or not they personally care about Jose and Fernando.

Students who leave high school average an unemployment rate of over 50% (Stanard, 2003). Have you ever read or seen any news reports on the amount of money local and national government is spending a year on drug related treatment and medical care? Students who leave school before graduating are almost twice as likely to use and/or abuse legal and illegal drugs (Swaim, Beauvais, Chavez, & Oetting, 1997). You do not know Jose and Fernando personally, but the reality is that dropout rates are not only affecting individuals. Dropout rates affect all of society (Mayer, 2004).

Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics shows that Latino males make up a large portion of the “dropout” statistics of the last 10-15 years. The research further highlights the total number of Latino male students that do not reach graduation increases if they are living in a city population that is less than 50% Latino (Mayer, 2004). Research like this supports the idea that Jose and Fernando not graduating might not be their fault at all. There are many factors that contributed to their outcome.

Some of the more predominant factors keeping students of color from graduating are socioeconomics, stereotypes, and school environment. These factors were evident in research performed by Wayman (2002), Brown & Rodriguez (2009), Balfanz & Legters (2001), and in the work of many other researchers that I will highlight in my literature review and throughout my thesis. I plan to research these themes to see if I can find out additional detail as well as to see if there are other factors present that were not

specifically listed in the resources I was able to find while conducting my literature review.

1.2 Research Questions

The primary question that guided my research is:

What socioeconomic factors lead to increased dropout rates among Latino male students?

My sub-questions include:

- How does stereotyping of Latino males affect their ability to do well in school?
- What role do school administrators, teachers, and the curriculum play in the dropout rates?

I chose these questions because the three themes of, socioeconomics, stereotyping/discrimination, and school environment were apparent in almost any piece of literature I located on the subject of students of color and dropouts. Stearns and Glennie (2006) specifically addressed the idea that “students face unique sets of pressures depending on their ethnicity and gender” (p. 29). Disciplinary policies, employment opportunities, and family responsibilities are just a few of the factors that can eventually “push or pull” students of color out of school. It is extremely important to understand the concept of “push and pull” to thoroughly understand the factors involved. When I refer to push I am specifically talking about factors that “push” students out school such as school environment, lack of support for ESL (English as a second language) or ELL (English language learners), and school policies that are often unfair to students of color. Sometimes it can be attitude more than policy. People have fear of the unknown. Au,

2009 gives an excellent example of this when he talks about a substitute teacher who kicked three girls out of class for speaking Spanish. The “pull” is factors such as family needs, friends and gangs, and needing to work to survive. The degree of “push and pull” that takes place can vary for each individual student.

There are issues and injustices that often combine and lead to Latino males and other students of color leaving school. It is very seldom one reason that leads to an individual student’s decision to leave before graduating. As my research on the subject progresses I am finding that the themes are consistent throughout the last several decades, but the factors can change depending on the historical time period and the community being researched.

There is plenty of research that shows that students of color are dropping out at an excessive rate (Weissberg, 2010), but there is much less research available that shows why this is happening from their point of view. Educators understand why graduating high school is important and often assume that all students are “naturally” inclined to want to finish school and that they understand the long-term value. This is not always the case with all students.

Another dangerous assumption is that the data being provided to researchers by the schools they are studying is accurate. This is not always the case. Sometimes numbers can be intentionally or unintentionally compromised. For example “Each year Texas public high schools lose at least 135,000 youth prior to graduation. Despite the state’s official dropout statistics, which hover in the 2.8-3.2% range” (Texas Education Agency, 2002). McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, and Heilig (2008) attribute this to the way

the numbers are counted. School funding can be tied to numbers leading to pressure to report positive numbers or leave certain groups of students intentionally out of the numbers (Weissberg, 2010). Weissberg's research reinforced my assertion that additional research needs to be conducted that includes data that is provided by the Latino males that are being affected. It is important that research is performed that cannot be bent or altered by outside pressure or possibly misrepresented due to institutional biases

There are two important variables that can impact the ability to get accurate data on this subject. The first is that schools (specifically administrators and teachers) have a vested interest in showing progress year to year. (Weissberg, 2010) The second variable is that many families of color refuse to or are unable to participate in the types of studies that can help researchers paint an accurate picture. There can often be language barriers that keep them from participating. In some cases drug use can play a factor and heavy users are unlikely to be captured directly in studies or research related to drug use in the school (Swaim, et al., 1997). School policy can lead to students being dismissed or leaving school due to absences. Unless the students/families are willing to share that drug use was a factor in these absences, the number can go unreported. This may well mean that although it is a potential factor that information is not being properly captured (Swaim, et al., 1997). There are many other possible reasons for not participating including fear, time availability, and cultural reasons. Often comparisons being made year to year are not "apples to apples" and results can be skewed depending on the involved party's willingness to participate.

I feel not only myself, but educators like me, might be able to help fill in the gaps if we properly utilize the close relationships we have developed with communities in which the majority of residents are people of color. This can be done by keeping an open dialogue and by including community members while constructing and executing research. It is not fair to complain about the lack of qualitative data available unless you are willing to assist in adding to it.

There may possibly be other reasons why an elevated number of Latino male students are leaving school before graduating high school. Currently a majority of the available research I am finding is from an institutional or government point of view. Specifically the data from institutions is based strictly on quantitative numbers. Government reports on both the federal and state levels simply give quantities, racial generalities, and percentages based on those generalities. Therefore, there may be other reasons that are not being captured completely by the current research that is available. McNeil, et al., 2008; Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2008; and Swaim, Beauvais, & Chavez, 1997 all speak to the statistics on dropout rates and the sometimes less than accurate way they are collected. The objective of my research is to add to the knowledge base of why Latino males do not finish school, and more importantly, identify factors from their own perspective.

1.3 Rationale

It is important to break this issue down into smaller pieces to better understand the causes and to scope out potential solutions. Students of color make up the largest portion of the dropout rate increase. Specifically Black and Latino students make up the majority

of that statistic. The Latino population by far has seen the largest increase in those numbers versus any other groups (Greico & Cassidy, 2001). Latino males are leaving high school before graduating at an alarming rate. Statistics show that Latino students on the whole are leaving school at a rate of 2 to 1 versus African American³ students and 3 to 1 versus white students (National Center for Education Research, 2009). There is an abundance of statistics on the subject that are available nationwide, but the legitimacy of those statistics often depends on your perspective. To better express some of the issues surrounding those statistics I will use Texas as an example.

Texas schools were used as one of the main models for the “standardized, high-stakes test-based accountability” system currently being used in the United States today. Under that model more than 135,000 students leave school in Texas every year before graduating (Texas Education Agency, 2002). Latino and African American students make up more than 60% of those 135,000 students (McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Vasquez, 2008). That statistic becomes even more interesting when you take into account that the state reported a dropout rate in 2002 that reflected 2.8-3.2% (Texas Education Agency, 2002). The reality is that almost 50% of Latino and African American students in Texas are not completing high school (Balfanz & Legters, 2001). These numbers are not only alarming, but raise the question of why African American and Latino students make up such a large portion of the students leaving school before graduating. In the instance of Texas, many believe that the test-based performance model and the disaggregation of those results is not assisting in identifying students that need

³ “American” – I will be using the word American in this thesis in the context of United States American.

additional educational resources, but is actually leading to them being discriminated against (Balfanz & Legters, 2001). Again McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008 makes reference to the more than 135,000 students who leave school without graduating every year. More than 60% of the youth they followed who were African or Latino American left school before graduating.

There has been a long-standing false perception that students were pulling away from education. As Balfanz and Legters (2001) shows many students in Texas may actually be getting “pushed” out of school. In other words, students may be directly or indirectly encouraged to leave school. Balfanz and Legters (2001) shows research in Philadelphia that time and resources are not being spent on students who are “at risk”. Of the group they studied they found that 6th graders that had “A final grade of F in mathematics, a final grade of F in English, attendance below 80 percent for the year, or a final “unsatisfactory” behavior mark in at least one class” were 75% more like to drop out of school before graduating (Balfanz & Legters, 2001). If schools have the ability to create a hostile environment for people of color or communities are unable to hold their educational institutions accountable we will continue to see an increase in students leaving school before graduating. When I first started to explore this topic, I entertained the broad idea of researching students of color who drop out of high school. A short exploration of the available research led me to quickly realize that the reasons students of color leave school have some common themes, but vary depending on a variety of socioeconomic factors. Many of these factors are affected further by gender. Given the overwhelming number of variables I found it necessary to narrow the subject down to

specifically Latino males to stay within the scope and time-line of my current pilot research project.

1.4 Thesis Roadmap

My thesis begins with Section 1.1 where I introduce my topic “Socioeconomic Factors That Lead to Latino Male Students Leaving School before Graduating” and I further explain why I chose this topic. Section 1.2 highlights my main research question: “What socioeconomic factors lead to increased dropout rates among Latino male students?” It also includes the sub-topics of “How does stereotyping of Latino males affect their ability to do well in school?” and “What role do school administrators, teachers, and the curriculum play in dropout rates?” This is followed by a detailed rationale in Section 1.3 as to why I feel the topic deserves additional research.

Section 2 covers the literature I reviewed before and during my research. I acknowledge in Section 2.1 that the focus of my research is the “negative” factors that lead to Latino male students leaving school, but that I want to give credit to the many teachers and institutions that are doing their best to address this issue. The following three sub-sections highlight the prevailing themes identified in the literature: Section 2.2 addresses school environment, Section 2.3 covers specific socioeconomic factors, and Section 2.4 focuses on the effects of stereotyping/discrimination.

I address both my methods and biases in Section 3. Section 3.1 includes the methods for my research and the logic behind choosing those methods. This includes explanation of my survey and interview question preparation, details on my data collection method, and details as to how I coded/analyzed the incoming data. The biases

relevant to my topic are outlined in Section 3.2. In this section I also address the steps taken to limit the affect these biases have on my research. I further detail what checks and balances were put in place to make certain that my research results would not be impacted by those biases.

Section 4 details both my findings and analysis. The research setting is established in Section 4.1. Demographics of the participants involved are covered in Section 4.2. This is followed by a synthesis of how the findings and analysis support the themes presented in my literature review from Section 2. The data from Section 4.3 strongly supports socioeconomics factors, Section 4.4 shows the influence of school environment, and Section 4.5 illustrates the effects of stereotyping/discrimination.

I conclude by drawing plans for future research in Section 5. This section highlights that the data I collected supports the themes from my literature review in Section 2. It also addresses how I plan to adjust my methods in future research and how I plan to further mitigate my biases outlined in section 3.2. This section includes additional sub-themes that I would like to investigate further. I look at this research and thesis as the first step in a long progression of my future research agenda.

Section 2 Literature Review

2.1 Statement of Acknowledgment

I would like to clarify a few things before I dig deeply into many of the negative factors related to socioeconomics, stereotyping/discrimination, and school environment that have adversely impacted the Latino male student population. There are many great communities in the United States that have exemplary school environments, administrators, and teachers. Even in communities where the school environment is less than exemplary there are community members, administrators, teachers, and students that are working tirelessly every day to raise the level of education in their neighbors. As I am studying the factors that lead to Latino male students that leave school before graduating, I will be concentrating on negative factors throughout my thesis. This is in no way meant to minimize or ignore their efforts. The purpose of this thesis is to explore areas where additional understanding needs to be obtained and further attention may need to be given to improve the outcome for all students.

2.2 Theme 1: School Environment

The first theme I encountered in all of the literature was that of school environment. I do not believe that this theme has more significance than stereotyping or socioeconomics, but due to the nature of the research that has been performed it is definitely the most well documented of the three themes. There are a many pieces of literature that support this theme. (E.g. Hill and Torres, 2010; DeBlassie & DeBlassie, 1996; and Brown and Rodriquez, 2009) If we want to keep Jose and Fernando in school we need to better understand what being there is like for them. So far I think Hill &

Torres (2010) gave the best synopsis I have seen so far while researching this topic.

They summarized:

“Latino students are currently the most segregated racial or ethnic group in the United States in terms of school enrollment (DeBlassie & DeBlassie, 1996). They attend the most poorly equipped schools in the most impoverished school districts (Peske & Haycock, 2006) and are most likely to have inadequate instructional materials and teachers with less experience (Conchas, 2001). Such schools do not promote the link between academic success and mobility” (Ogbu, 1983, p. 97).

The reason this summary was so poignant was that it encompassed the themes of some well-developed research. To expand on this summary DeBlassie & DeBlassie (1996) lists “family status/composition, educational values/educational attainment, and school segregation” all to be significant contributing factors. Peske & Haycock (2006) specifically identifies that teacher quality may be directly impacted by the funding available for the schools. Ogbu (1983) further summarizes in his study of academic disengagement that many students do not believe equal opportunity exists in education. He states that, “it made some students skeptical as to the real value of school credentials and discouraged some students from striving to maximize their academic performance” (Ogbu, 1983). If students do not have faith in their educational system that undoubtedly could play a role in their academic success.

This research aligned directly with what I observed while working in one of the lowest funded school districts in the state of Illinois. Due to the transient nature of the local population and the lack of school funding, the school environment was not very

stable. I observed that teacher turnover rate was high and it was difficult to gauge the need for special services year to year. I would doubt it is a shock to anyone that much of the research related to students of color leaving school early focuses on school environment. School environment is where stereotypes and socioeconomics have the ability to culminate in inflicting the most harm and creating some of the “push” and “pull” factors that lead to students leaving school. It is somewhat shocking as most people tend to look at teachers and administrators with the reverence of doctors and expect them to “Do no harm”.

There was an abundance of literature to support the theme that the educational environment is a significant factor in a student’s success in school. In “School and the Co-Construction of Dropout,” Brown and Rodriguez (2009) outline how through “social and intellectual alienation, schools and school adults contribute to student disengagement from school” (p. 221). If the environment is not a positive one, students lose interest. If they lose interest, then their ability to be successful is inevitably compromised. When students fall behind in the classroom it can be difficult for them to stay interested.

There are many reasons that students lose interest. They may find material in school to be culturally irrelevant to them, they could feel that school policies target them specifically because of their culture, or they may feel that if they are not part of the dominant culture that they are not welcome in their schools. This could be as simple as the toys that are picked out for a kindergarten classroom and as complex as the languages students are allowed to speak in their school environments (Au, 2009). The entire community plays a role. That role can be constructive or destructive. One teacher or

administrator can lead to a student giving up. To Latino male students like Jose and Fernando who are already having difficulty in school, even a single statement from an adult or another student they look up to can have devastating consequences.

School administration sits at the top of this hierarchy. The decisions that are made related to a school's disciplinary model, distribution of services and general policies play an important role in the success of a school and its students.

Superintendents and principals wield enormous amount of power. They have the ability to control school environment in both positive and negative ways. Some of the negative ways they can impact the environment and "push" students out of school is by suspending or expelling students. I agree that student safety comes first and that in a small amount of situations suspension or expulsion may be necessary. In some cases students may be suspended due to stereotyping, discrimination, or even to try and bring up the academic numbers of a school. Greg Toppo wrote in USA Today (2011) that "The Council of State Governments, a Kentucky-based research organization, looked at suspension and expulsion rates for Texas public schools and found that nearly six in 10 minority students had been suspended or expelled at least once between seventh and 12th grade" (p. 3). The federal government further found that while suspension rates for "white" students had increased from 3 to 5 percent from 1972-2006 that suspension rate for Hispanic students rose from 3 to 7 percent for the same time period. Those two statistics raise some questions as to if Latino students are being somehow singled out by school disciplinary policies. (Toppo, 2011)

Administrators have the ability to deny services to students that may help them to stay in school. This type of discrimination can take place in many ways. Sports or clubs that may interest students of color may be given less attention or support. Grants and scholarship money that specifically targets students of color may not be pursued or given the same level of priority. Wise (2008) challenges the notion that minority scholarships take up too much funding. The reality is that those scholarships targeted for students of color make up less than 4% of the money being spent. Before or after school programs may not be provided at a level that is high enough to make a difference. ESL and ELL programs might be given at a level high enough to meet mandates, but not at a level significant to make a difference for the students that need them.

School policy can often be exercised in a way that may intentionally or unintentionally alienate students of color. There are several ways in which this can take place. Dress codes that do not accommodate differences in culture are one way that students are forced to conform to a “White American” standard of attire. Some schools have gone as far as deciding that some pictures on a t-shirt are acceptable while others are not (Swafford, et. al, 2011). I understand that some images are openly offensive, but who gets to decide that Mickey Mouse is allowed and a peaceful picture of a Christian “Maria” in a garden is not? Dress policies that attempt to separate church and state can also put pressure on students to limit their religious expressions that may have deep roots in their culture (Swafford, Jolley, & Southward, 2011).

The school could have language policies that encourage students to speak only English. Many researchers have found that bilingual education is more successful than

immersion. They found that bilingual education can strengthen both languages at the same time (Au, 2009). Some researchers feel that those results have not been popular due to government policies that support “English Only” (Fitts & Weisman, 2010).

Government policies can have a serious impact on which way a school systems decides to approach the subject. There is no argument that it is important for students who live in the United States to learn English, but that does not need to be at the expense of them retaining or learning the language(s) their families speak at home.

Many school curriculums do not properly take into account specific needs for students that are ESL, ELL, or have different learning styles. Many disregard simple language and focus on complex language. Simple language can be very powerful as it helps with having a clear understanding of content (Freire, 2005). Although schools have discontinued the practices of the 1920’s in labeling students as “culturally deprived” or “educable mentally retarded” and have stopped condemning ESL and ELL students to remedial classrooms, literature and study materials are still often limited in their content to products that support primarily English learners that have mainstream learning styles (Rolon, 2005). Very little consideration is given to students that may be learning multiple languages or whose primary language is not English. Content is geared towards people who speak English and grew up in “U.S. American” culture. This may be fine for students who are middle/upper class, “White”, speak standard English, and have grown up in the United States, but leaves all other students that do not meet those criteria at varying levels of disadvantage. This approach can lead to institutional discrimination as many languages that are spoken by the students are discarded in favor of English. The

number of Latino students in our school systems is increasing every year. More than 70% of those students are speaking Spanish at home, yet bilingual opportunities in the schools for those students are not keeping pace with that growth (Rolon, 2005).

Standardized testing often adds to this problem. The need to meet testing goals can be the deciding factor on curriculum. Although many of the testing companies are spending resources and time trying to improve the diversity of their testing, the amount of testing materials that focus on history or literature that is relevant to people of color is limited. Most materials are written from a “white” standardized English emphasized perspective. This can leave people of color at a disadvantage when being measured by standards that are not reflective of their culture. Language is not the only barrier. Cultural differences can also create difficulties in understanding context (Lomax and West, 1995). For example, using the number of stairs on an escalator as a math reference is meaningless to a student who has never seen one. It is important that we assess the content knowledge of a student and not just be a measure their ability to speak standardized English. We need to ensure that the test scores show what the students know even if that means that we need offer the test in multiple languages.

In the article “Avoidable losses: High stakes accountability and the dropout crisis” McNeil, Coppoal, Radigan & Vasquez (2008) speak directly to the issues as they are related to a school’s disciplinary model, services, and policies. They conducted a series of interviews in which high school age students express their understanding of the pressures on their school and the impact of policies on students. Some of the highlights included attendance policies that led to students having to go to court or repeat grades,

classes that were constructed as test practice, and little encouragement from teachers, counselors, and principals for them to stay in school.

Some school districts have let teachers go due to low student testing scores. Some schools will simply relocate (i.e. change the school enrollment records to show a student to be at a different school in the district) or “push out” students that would lower their test scores or ratings (Patterson, et al., 2008). In the article “Cultural Contradictions and School Leaving,” Patterson, et al. (2008) studied an urban high school that had a 53.6% dropout rate in 2002-03. They used personal interviews, focus groups, and a document review to better understand the high dropout rate. Their finding was that contradictions in school and familial culture, beliefs about students, beliefs about parents and families, and teacher instructional practices versus student needs were all factors (Patterson, et al, 2008). If expectations at home and at school do not complement each other, this can stifle the success of the student. It is easy to see, based on their research, why it is important to look at this topic as a whole.

The harsh reality is that if you can eliminate the students who are not doing well, it is much easier to raise test scores and the overall rating of your school. Unfortunately, it appears that some schools have been doing just that. McNeil, et al. (2008) showed in their research that there was a direct correlation between “high stake testing” and increase in students of color leaving school before graduating. If we “teach to the test” which is in standard English less time is spent on other learning opportunities. When teachers are forced to meet numbers it can have a negative impact on what they teach and how they teach it. Teaching style and expectations also play a role in the success of Latino male

students. Schools have been getting much better at addressing cultural bias, but there is still a long way to go. Some teachers may be nice to Latino students, but will still carry stereotypes and lower expectations for them as a group. Valenzuela (2004) further illustrated the influence of “Texas Style” education on Latino students when she talked about how teachers engaged in the practice of putting extra effort into students that were close to passing, but gave up on students that they felt were not going to pass the test. As an educator I feel this act is reprehensible and goes directly against the responsibility of being a teacher.

Classroom environments and teaching styles will often favor students of the dominant culture. The dominant culture’s social norms and traditions can often intentionally or unintentionally be used as the basis for priorities in education and code of conduct. If the Latino male student is also ELL, a classroom that emphasizes the dominant culture could make him feel alienated as a student. This reality further makes Latino males feel like outcasts in a school setting. This perception can make the situation more unbearable when you take into account that many Latino students already feel like their culture or economic status restricts them from being in the “in group” and that not being in that group has led to different treatment of them by faculty members (Wayman, 2002).

Language barriers and differences in social norms can lead to conflicts with students, teachers, and other school personnel. Sometimes that conflict takes the form of indifference or disregard of their needs. Many Latino male students are unable to get involved in school activities due to a need to help provide income for their families

(Stearns & Glennie, 2006). They further identify in their research the pull students feel due to family responsibilities, care of siblings, and elders. This is yet another example of the “pull” they may feel toward family responsibility and can often lead to success at school being a lower priority. The need to provide ELL support, alternative assignments, culturally sensitive curriculum materials, and equitable testing is a daunting undertaking.

Teacher diversity, style, and expectations are another important factor in school environment. Teachers are on the front line of education. They are the people with whom the students often have the most contact within the schools. They are often sources of mentorship and modeling for young people. Many students may have the opportunity to spend more time with their teachers than they do with their own parents on a daily basis. Those facts make how a school district chooses its teachers a vital part of the educational environment.

The teaching staff at a school needs to reflect the diversity of the students and community. We need to be realistic in our expectations. Teachers of color are increasing in number, but it is not always possible to find teachers that came from the community to fill teaching positions. If possible, teachers who come from the community should be given the opportunity to teach in the community when they are ready. When that is not possible, the administration should do their best to hire teachers that have training in multicultural education and cultural sensitivity. I think sometimes administrators use the excuse that teachers who grew up in the neighborhood are not interested in teaching in the neighborhood. As an educator, I believe that attitude is unfair. Economics can often play a role as teachers in “rich neighborhoods” often make more money. You also need

to take into account that many people who grow up in an area simply want to expand their horizons or try out some place new. Opportunities should be given so that teachers can give back to their community whenever possible without having to face lower pay to do so. All teachers should be expected to be educated in multicultural education no matter where they teach.

Teaching style should be considered when hiring any teachers. I had stated in the previous paragraph that all teachers should be required to have training in multicultural education. This is important because without that training they may lack cultural sensitivity, which will often lead to a teaching style that intentionally or unintentionally alienates students of color. Teachers need to be able to adjust so that all students feel comfortable in their classrooms. Diversity in teaching style allows all students the opportunity to grow and be successful. Increasing diversity in our teaching population could improve this situation. To successfully accomplish this, programs need to be created that give teachers of color better opportunities to be successful in teaching programs (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

2.3 Theme 2: Socioeconomics

The second theme I encountered while reviewing the literature received the most emphasis as a contributing factor to students of color leaving school before graduating. Socioeconomics was mentioned in a considerable amount of the literature I read. Just to name a few, Balfanz & Legters (2001), Brown & Rodriguez (2009), DeBlassie & DeBlassie (1996), and Peske & Haycock (2006) all identified socioeconomics as a factor. The simple definition of socioeconomics is – Relating to or concerned with the

interaction of social and economic factors (Merriam-Webster, 2011). It is a great word to use for encompassing a broad topic. Brown and Rodriguez (2009) provided a unique insight into the lives of two Latino students. This article followed Angel and Ramone who are both Puerto Rican male students, going through the process of leaving school before graduation. The authors addressed the socioeconomic factors that played a role. To truly understand what it means in the context of students of color (specifically Latino males) it is imperative to break it down into smaller pieces to contrast social and economic factors individually and as a whole. Income, differences in cultural norms, and community environment are all socioeconomic factors that were prevalent in the literature.

Income often plays a significant role in both the quality of the schools in a community and the resources that are available to assist students in being successful. There are a wide variety of ways that income can have an effect. A lack of income in a neighborhood can specifically impact the local environment which I will talk about specifically later in this paper. Both gaps in property taxes and deficit spending at a local level, can affect school funding. This can lead to inadequate materials in quantity and quality. These may include, but are not limited to facilities, multi-media assets, and classroom materials. Low income neighborhoods are less likely to attract teachers, business partnerships, and funding. Lack of income in a school district can affect programs and available resources. Students will in some cases be in a fully inclusive environment and specialty educators may or may not have the ability to get them the

accommodations they need to be successful in the classroom (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009).

The amount of public services in a neighborhood also has an impact on student success. If parents are unable to find work they may not have enough money to supply their children with the materials needed for school. In extreme situations they may not be able to provide students with the nutrition needed to maintain their attention in school. Services that assist with learning disabilities, language support, or special family needs may be scarce or possibly unavailable. It can be difficult for a student to concentrate on school if they spend most of their time concentrating on day to day hunger or survival. The likelihood that some or all of these negative conditions may be encountered is more likely in low-income neighborhoods.

Understanding cultural norms in a neighborhood is also beneficial. To an uneducated eye differences in culture may appear to be negative or counterproductive to the educational process. Just because a culture maybe soft spoken or some parents may not have yet acquired functional English speaking skills, does not in any way diminish their desire for the young people to be successful in school. Not all parents have the time to be directly involved in school. Their most important contribution may be working so that their children have the opportunity to go to school. In Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2001) they asked immigrant parents how do you get ahead in the United States. Education was the most predominant response. It can be difficult for parents to participate in their child's education when they are working multiple jobs, they feel

socially awkward interacting with teachers, or they do not speak the language (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Differences in culture can also result in differences in priorities. Those differences should not be immediately viewed as negative. What is important to “white” mainstream society is not inherently superior. The needs and desires of all cultures in a community must be given attention. The standards of the community should carry equal weight to those of the state. The vision for the future for each student needs to include the goals of that student and their family. The curriculum needs to reflect the values of the community and its diversity of culture.

Crime, gangs, and housing conditions are not a reflection of culture. Not having resources is not a culture. Unfortunately a lack of resources can often lead to an increase in crime, gangs, and substandard housing. All of these conditions can have a negative influence on student success. These distractions, when combined with other challenges, can cause a student to be unable to concentrate on school. A need to bring money home to the family can lead to crime and further lead to joining a gang for protection in prison or on the streets (Vigil, 2002).

A student’s housing situation can affect their success in the classroom. Not only can housing in a “low-income” neighborhood be dilapidated, it can also have inadequate space for the size of the family living in it. This can make finding a quiet place to study difficult for a student. If parents or a single parent are unable to make enough income to provide more living space for their family, some students may also find themselves in a situation where they have to take care of younger siblings so that the parent(s) can go to

work and earn money for the family. As I had stated earlier Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001 mentions the difficulty parents may have in finding time to get involved in their child's education when they are working two or three jobs.

Crime and gangs can add an extra layer of complexity to the situation. It can be very difficult for students to concentrate on school when they have to be concerned for their safety. Low-income areas often have an increased level of crime and gang activity. Students may join gangs due to pressure, fear, or in some cases even loyalty to relatives or family members. Anytime there is a breakdown in the educational or familial support system it creates an opportunity for young adults to find that support elsewhere. This is one of the most basic needs that often can be filled by gang membership (Vigil, 2002). School often is not a priority to gang members and has been known to be a factor for some Latino males when making the decision to leave school before graduating.

I will address the social issues that are specific to the educational environment later, but want to mention a few of those factors now as they are relevant to the current theme I am addressing. Culture, gender, and ethnic background are all relevant when discussing the social status of Latino males. Like many cultures Latino males tend to band together for support. The high poverty rate among predominantly Latino communities has significantly affected the social structure and the institutions that are available for them to join.

Many Latino students feel like outcasts not only in their schools, but in their communities (Hill & Torres, 2010). They can often be disregarded or feared by other community members. Stereotypes that I discussed earlier in this literature review have

led to non-Latino communities often treating young Latino males as a threat or a nuisance. When communities do not actively fight those stereotypes, they do not discourage Latino youth from emulating those stereotypes. Low expectations can encourage young people to act out and exhibit negative behavior. In low-income communities a lack of funding and appropriate activities has often led to an increase in gang membership. Unfortunately, in some communities a gang is the only “club” where young Latino males feel like they are welcome or valued. Sometimes Latino male students have trouble fitting in to their school communities. Gang members often mistake fear for respect. Part of the issue is that in many school’s Euro-American culture is considered normative and non-dominant cultures are therefore considered deviant (Hill & Torres, 2010).

Educational institutions that are staffed mostly by members of the dominant culture increase the pressure on students from non-dominant cultures to conform. The article “Navigating the Thin Line between Education and Incarceration: An Action Research Case Study on Gang-Associated Latino Youth” gave two examples. The author shares the story of Julio who was in honors classes up until junior high, but left because almost all of the other students were “white” and he did not fit in. Another example is when William got into a fight with a “white” student. The white student was not disciplined as harshly as William was (Rios, 2010).

Latino males may also turn to gangs for protection from other crime in their own neighborhood and for safety on the street while avoiding going home to crowded or sometimes undesirable family/living situations (Oguntoyinbo, 2009). Economics may

appear on the surface to be a more straight forward issue, but it is not lacking in complexity as it relates to Latino males. Indeed there is the basic concern of making money, but social and cultural factors place extra pressure on Latino males. Many Latino males are often expected to start working when they are of legal age to do so. In the eyes of their family members and peers it is their responsibility to assist in meeting the economic needs of their entire family (Oguntoyinbo, 2009).

Many Latino males live in economically depressed areas and assisting their family with financial needs is not a question of standard of living, it is often a question of survival. Low-income jobs often do not provide adequate or even any medical benefits. Supplies of public services are often unable to keep up with the need/demand for them. Economic and social issues often blur together due to their codependency. It is not always easy to separate them. That is why it is important to understand the idea of “push” and “pull”. It is very rare that only one of these forces lead to leaving school. It is usually both “push” and “pull” even though it may vary how much each factor and sub-factor plays a role.

Economics can affect your social standing and in turn social standing can affect your ability to get a job or make money. The issue of social standing based on perception and discrimination was well presented in Duneier’s (2000) “Race and Peeing on Sixth Street”. Duneier (2000) showed how easily people can be discriminated against when people use even a short list of subjective evaluations to determine the value or social status of the person being observed. Many Latino males who leave school early have parents who have also left school early or have little education. Some have lived lives of

manual labor in an attempt to make a better life for their families. Education is important to these families, but sometimes daily survival has to take priority. In some cases families live in fear of their “undocumented” status and try to keep a low profile to avoid possible deportation. The fact that children attend school and learn English immediately after they arrive in the United States can create a situation of role reversal where the children end up as translators or advocates for their parents who do not have the same exposure to the language (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). The children in the family will often learn English faster than their parents. Parents can find themselves unable directly communicate with their educational institutions to support their children in completing high school.

College is expensive and requires loans. It can easily become impossible situation when parents may lack proper immigration papers and live in fear of being deported (Oguntoyinbo, 2009, p. 15). Proper documentation is needed to apply for colleges and receive financial aid. All of these factors tie further into educational environment, which I will discuss in greater detail. If a Latino male student’s parents have not completed high school, how are they supposed to help their child with their homework? They want their children to do well in school, but are simply not in a position financially in many cases to acquire additional support. To clarify I am not only talking about basics subjects matters like math, science, and social studies. The issue goes deeper than that.

When a Latino male goes home to his family and the primary language at home is not “standard” English, how is he supposed to function in an English dominated school

setting? He may simply lack the practice needed to properly master the language required to do well in school. Concentrating on English is not always the best way to foster creativity. It can leave students feeling afraid to articulate themselves in their writing (Au, 2009). The interrelated nature between social and economic issues is why socioeconomics as a combined word represents this theme well. Due to these factors it is difficult and often impossible for Latino males to keep their eyes on long-term goals when most of their short-term goals are dominated with the reality of trying to survive and support the needs of their families.

2.4 Theme 3 Stereotyping and Discrimination

The third major theme I saw in much of the literature available is that of stereotyping and discrimination towards students of color. Patterson, Hale, & Stessman (2008) noted, “Many cultural assumptions are so deeply ingrained that it is difficult to conceive of organizing them in any other way” (p. 11). Many of the stereotypes people carry about Latino males are the product of years of negative portrayals in the literature and media. Some of the more predominant negative stereotypes towards Latino males used in the literature and media include: they are unable to speak English properly, lazy or unmotivated as students, classroom disciplinary problems who are violent or confrontational, macho, thugs or gang members, not bound for college, and are best suited for manual labor or trades.

To eliminate some of these stereotypes it is important to develop a view of Latino male students that counters the common view that “poor students of color are inherently ‘at risk’ for school dropout” (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009, p.221). When teachers and

administrators assume that students like Jose and Fernando are at risk they are more likely to treat them that way. In a perfect world that would mean that those students are identified and given additional assistance. Most of the time, however, that viewpoint leads to an assumption of failure and further results in those students being ignored or even “pushed” out of school. In the end simply labeling students as being “at risk” tends to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Discrimination and stereotyping are an unfortunate fact of life for many Latino males. It can take many different forms. It could be as subtle as someone locking their car door the second they get in because they see a Latino male nearby. It could also be less subtle like when a cop pulls over a Latino male in a predominantly white neighborhood simply because they are Latino. A recent example of this type of profiling and discrimination is when Arizona passed a law that led to Latino United States citizens having to show paperwork when they are in cities near the border of Mexico as if they need to prove on a daily basis they are “American”. In its most extreme form it could mean being put in prison for longer than someone else who has committed the same crime or even being put in prison when you have committed no crime simply because the color of your skin or the language you speak.

This type of discrimination and stereotyping is nothing new. It has been happening for hundreds of years based on race and ethnic background. This shifting dual standard of who belongs and who does not belong has been around since the infancy of the United States and before the first explorers touched foot in the what they considered to be the “New World”. Imagine how the inhabitants felt when a few white men

happened upon civilizations that had been living and dying in North and South America and systematically took their possessions and land and nearly wiped them off the face of the earth.

The media situation has improved over the years, but there are still many challenges. The television networks have increasingly been giving actors and actresses of color lead roles in television and movies. “American” culture is finally beginning to move away from the stereotype of the ignorant Native saying “How” and nodding or the overweight sombrero-wearing Latino (implied to be Mexican) sleeping up against a building and saying “sí” to every question he is asked as was often seen in many “spaghetti” westerns and comic books. Unfortunately, many of those shows and movies have not been overwhelmingly successful. Pop culture tends to favor the shows that keep other demeaning old stereotypes. To this day, more people tune in to watch media that portrays Latino males as ignorant/defiant gang members or thugs driving around in super up “low-riders” than there are people interested in watching a Latino male judge helping people in his community. Many “law and order” type shows and documentaries on crime and gangs capitalize on these stereotypes. Shows like “Worlds Dumbest” capitalize on these negative stereotypes as a form of humor as well.

That is not to say that there aren’t positive role models out there for students of color. The Cosby Show, Judge Mathis, Judge Alex, Judge Pirro, Sesame Street, and the George Lopez show come to mind. These programs showcase people of color for their brains, acting ability, and many positive contributions on and off the screen. They are a small percentage of the total media out there. Only a small portion of media specifically

targets people of color. The percentage of media that specifically targets positive Latino male role models is even less likely to receive commercial backing and network support.

Other progress is being made. Documentaries like “Divided We Fall” (Kaur & Raju, 2006) and television series like “Race” (Adelman, 2003) are finally finding their way to mainstream audiences in the United States. “Divided We Fall” (Kaur & Raju, 2006) drew attention to the negative backlash that Sikh Americans faced after the terrorist acts of 9-11. The documentary was constructed by a 20 year old third generation Sikh American woman Valerie Kaur and her cousin who recorded their road trip around the United States as they visited victims of race based attacks. In this instance Sikh Americans were attacked because of a false perception that their skin color, beards, and turbans were misinterpreted by ignorant people to mean that they were terrorists. Some of this negative perception was fueled by media that incited fear instead of unity and understanding.

In the series “Race” (Adelman, 2003) a real history of racial injustice was highlighted without attempting to downplay the harm, pain, and suffering that was caused. It showed how everyday Americans were stereotyped and discriminated against simply because of their, language, beliefs, skin color, physical features, or culture. This series pulled back the curtain on what has only recently made its way into modern United States history books as a small peep hole. The series showed the ever changing criteria that have denied people of color citizenship based on opinions, pseudo-science, and ignorance.

I have been able to share a few excellent example of culturally accurate, but those examples are hardly the historical norm. Documentaries like “Race” (Adelman, 2003) and “Divided We Fall” (Kaur & Raju, 2006) have pulled back the curtain. This does not mean that everyone is ready to look. Fighting stereotypes and discrimination is an everyday battle. We as a society have merely taken baby steps in the right direction. It is deeply imbedded into laws, media, and society and will take decades to root out. Every decision we make has the ability to stimulate this positive evolution or cause it to take longer.

Section 3 Methods and Statement of Bias

3.1 Methods

I utilized a mixed methods approach for my research (Creswell, 2008). To gain insight I needed to allow the people I am studying to send me a different direction to find answers. The survey and interviews I conducted were mostly qualitative in nature; however, some of the questions are quantitative, which helped me establish both impact of standard factors as well as assisted in giving me further direction for future research.

I focused on socioeconomics through an open-ended questionnaire. The contents of that questionnaire were discussed in detail with my committee as well as being individually reviewed with my advisor and committee chair. The questions were created using prior knowledge of the group I am studying as well as guidelines that I obtained while reading selections from Falk and Blumenreich (2005). Based on my initial findings, I arranged to conduct one-on-one interviews with those individuals that agreed to an interview.

The survey was conducted on Survey Monkey (2012), which is a secure survey host. The surveys were taken anonymously and the participants had an option to contact me to schedule a one-on-one interview. Even if they contacted me for an interview, their survey results remained anonymous. The interviews were conducted in person or on the phone depending on the availability of the participant. My goal was to have 25 participants in the survey and 5 participants in the interviews. I exceeded that number slightly and ultimately had 28 survey participants and 6 interview participants. All participants were 18 years of age or older.

The recruitment process utilized my relationship with a community I taught in at the beginning of my teaching career. I have maintained positive contact with many of my students over the years and have good access to the group I intended to study. While in the process of choosing a research topic I spoke with a few of those former students to see if I could find the best way to access the population of individuals I wanted to study. I was able to get in touch with a few of my former students who met the criteria for the study and interviews. I discussed my research idea and the intentions of my research with them and asked them if they knew any other Latino males who met the criteria for the research and might be willing to participate. Through those few students I was able to contact a few other former students from the area. Utilizing those students, Facebook, and word of mouth I was able to obtain access to enough people to meet the needs of my research. I was pleasantly surprised by their willingness to participate and not shocked at their desire to remain anonymous after what they had experienced in the past.

The survey questions were constructed with a variety of goals in mind. The first of those goals was to verify that the participants met the requirements of the study. I wanted to make certain that the data I would be collecting was from the specific population I intended to reach. Beyond that I wanted to get a general idea of where they were from and what their current employment situation was. Based on themes from the literature review, I added a couple of questions to establish the educational level of the participants' parents. I understood that I could only achieve a very limited picture of the participants from this information, but wanted to have a place to start as I formulated further questions to ask in the interviews.

The second distinct section of questions focused on school demographics. Those questions were intended to get a general impression from the study participants related to school staff and student population. I wanted to know if there were similarities in the ethnic makeup of the schools the participants attended or if there were any stark differences. School demographics was shown to play a role in my literature review and I wanted to see if there were any correlations or patterns prevalent that linked demographics to other question responses. I also wanted to know how the participants felt they were treated by staff members at their schools. The last portion of that section asked for their impressions on the classes they attended.

The third section addressed general experiences while in school. I sought to address a variety of factors in this section. These factors included attendance, home life, employment, and participation in sports or other extracurricular activities. As many of these factors can play a role in academic outcome I felt it important to get a basic idea of what their life was like while attending school. This was another area where I wanted to utilize to adjust interview questions based on responses collected from the survey.

The fourth section addressed specifically gang and drug pressures. While completing my literature review both of these factors played a negative role for many Latino male students. I desired to find out if these factors were present in the experiences of my research participants. Their responses were utilized to determine how many questions I would ask about gang and drugs in my interviews.

The final section was designed to find out how the decision to leave school before graduating affected them socially, financially, and with their families. This section

offered the opportunity for further detail in their responses. It addressed both reaction from their families, teaching community, and their friends. I took the opportunity to ask them specifically why they felt they did not finish and what that decision will mean for them in the future.

All answers to the survey were kept anonymous. All questions were setup in multiple choice grids. When appropriate, space was provided for short answers or explanations. No attempt was made to tie interview participants to their surveys. At the end I asked if they would be willing to participate in an interview simply to see if it appeared like I would be able to come up with enough participants for that portion of my research. A full list of the survey questions is available in Appendix 1.

Data analysis was enhanced by graphing and database tools that were provided by survey monkey. The site enabled me to post the information into excel both as a summary and by individuals answers. I can then use my technical skills to further refine and analyze the database of collected information. I also used principals provided in Creswell (2008) and Falk & Blumenreich (2005) to further code and analyze that data to best assess how it applies to answering my research questions.

The second portion of my research took the form of direct one on one interviews. All participants were guaranteed anonymity as I wanted the answers that I received to be candid. I left the questions broad as the goal of the research was not necessarily to get answers to all of my questions, but to figure out what direction to go in future research to find answers. It was also important to me that I did not try to place check marks next to themes that had already come up. I desired to find out from the participants if there were

additional questions that needed to be asked. A list of the interview questions can be reviewed in Appendix 2.

All interviews were transcribed and the names of the participants will be altered to ensure anonymity. I used the approach of linking my data to themes that I learned in Creswell (2008). The data was color coded after transcription to create linkage between the themes that were generated by both my literature review and survey results. The coding system I used allowed me to tie the answers to each other, my literature review, or in some cases to show new themes or sub-themes that emerged throughout the process. I achieved this by associating a primary color with each of the themes I found from my literature review. If a response supported one of those themes I highlighted it with that primary color. In some cases I found that responses supported one of the primary themes of my literature, but was not directly addressed by my literature review. I chose to color code those incidences with a lighter shade of the primary colors I had associated with my literature review themes. I used blue to code data that did not fit specifically into one of my primary themes from my literature review. Finally, I used orange to identify any responses that I felt supported multiple themes. This allowed me to easily reference the data while making conclusions.

3.2 Statement of Bias

There is no doubt that I have built in biases as I was born and raised in a “white collar” middle-class town in the Northwest Suburbs of Chicago. Most of my classmates growing up had similar socioeconomic status and racial backgrounds. There were very few students who did not graduate nor were there the pressures of gangs and drugs that

plagued the former students that will likely participate in my research survey and interviews. I would like to hope that by having done my student teaching in a district that had a large population of Latino students, some of my biases have been altered positively and in some cases eliminated. I also grew up in a racially tolerant family with two parents that were committed to racial equality and support of all ethnic groups.

“Creswell (2008) talked about using an “external” audit to validate your research.” I believe that by being aware of my biases and by using my committee and peers as external auditors I can properly ensure that my findings were not swayed by them. I am confident that I have a broad range of cultural backgrounds and research experience represented in both my committee and in my peers who have offered their suggestion and support during this process.

I made the decision to focus on Latino males because I taught in a district that had a very high population of Latino students. I have a vested interest in finding out why some of my former students and their friends did not graduate high school while others successfully were able to complete high school. My teaching experiences in a predominately Latino community should help me. Teaching Latino students on a daily basis was an education for me as well. I am relying on what I learned to assist me in differentiating factors as related to cultural norms and environmental obstacles to success. I also believe that same experience will allow me to temper my analysis. I hope that I have had enough contact with the local culture. That experience will assist me in understanding the priorities of that culture to be equal to and in some cases more important than the subjective analysis that often takes place due to the perspective and

priorities of the dominant culture. To assist me further I have a committee of educators/professors that will guide me through my research and assist me in reducing the impact of my biases. All three members of that committee have vast background in multicultural issues in education. I took advantage of their decades of experience as an additional check/balance to my biases while I was conducting my research.

Section 4 Findings and Analysis

4.1 Research Setting

The research setting took a few different forms. My main goal at all times was to make the participants feel comfortable. I taught in a school district for several years in the Chicago suburbs that was predominantly Latino. Almost a quarter of the participants were likely to be former students of mine. Not all of the participants would be from that same community, but based on the method of reaching them, most of the participants grew up in Chicago suburbs that had a significant Latino population.

The main group of individuals who assisted me in recruiting participants that met the needs of my research were in fact students of mine or close friends of my former students. I met with small group of those students once I had constructed my survey questions to discuss my research plan and to have them review the questions to make certain they were asked in a way that they felt would be clear to other participants. During that meeting I spent some time catching up with them, but at no time did I discuss the findings of my literature review. I wanted to ensure that their answers were not tainted by discussing my literature review with them. Many of them were very curious about my research and I emphasized that my main goal was to get open and honest answers to the questions. I offered to share my final thesis paper with them when I complete it so that they could see the results as well as read about the literature that is out there on the subject. So other than the topic, we did not discuss the themes that I had encountered. I felt that proceeding this way was critical to my research because my true intent was to collect information that would help me determine where to head with future

research that I want to perform. My research for this thesis was intended to be the beginning of a journey and not a destination.

As I had stated I met with a few of the students in their neighborhood for pizza. At that time I brought my laptop and showed them what the survey on Survey Monkey looked like, how to access it, and what measures I took to keep their answers anonymous. The reassurance that their answers would be “anonymous” was a major concern to many of the participants as some of them are affiliated with local gangs. I also found that many of them were embarrassed about not completing high and did not want other people to know what they said. I showed them that on Survey Monkey, other than date or time, I had set the data collection to not include their local IP address and that the questions did not request any personal information from them. I further promised that as I reviewed the responses, if anyone accidentally gave information that would identify them, I would make sure to remove it before I shared data with anyone else.

We then discussed the interviews. I explained to them that I would more than likely recognize voices or answers from former students and that those two things would probably reveal their identity to me. I reassured them that if that happened there was no danger of anyone finding out their identities. They wanted to know how I would ensure that. I responded by letting them all know that on the interviews I would transcribe the data and assign a number to the interviewee and that at no time would I use their real names in my data collection. If I felt something they were saying would directly identify them I would let them know and strike it from their response. I explained that other than my advisor, nobody would see their responses intact. I gave them a general description

of how I would use the interview data. In that description I told them I would be using quotes from the interviews to support or expand upon my findings in the survey. This way when someone read my data analysis and conclusions they would not see the entirety of their interview responses. When I brought up the idea of taping the interviews, I quickly realized that was a major sticking point. I decided almost immediately to drop the idea. I am hopeful that I can get recorded interviews in future research, but for the purpose of this research it was more important to me to get candid answers than voices on a recording. By proceeding in this way there would be nearly no chance of attributing the pieces to one respondent and in turn would thoroughly shield their identity. Based on our discussion of the subject and the body language I observed, I believe they left our meeting feeling confident and comfortable with my data collection methods.

The surveys were all completed online so the setting was their computers, a local library, or a smart phone. Survey Monkey provides a great interface and most of the responses were collected by point and click. The program also allows you to set parameters for acceptable answers so it was possible for me to prevent participants from skipping basic questions that were created to make certain they met the research criteria and also allowed me to format questions so that I could collect extended responses.

Interviews were conducted in two ways. The first was face to face. This method only included two of the six participants. The second method was to schedule phone calls that worked with their schedules. Both of the face to face interviews were with students that I knew very well and I got the sense that they just wanted to meet up so that not only could they assist me with my research, but so they would have the opportunity to

chat and catch up. I made certain that we met at a place they were comfortable with and in both instances we talked for a bit and caught up for a while before we went into the research interview. I wanted to make sure they knew that I was really interested in what is going on in their lives and that they were welcome to contact me to talk. It was essential for me that they did not feel I only cared about their responses for my research. This worked really well for me as I believe I obtained some of the most interesting and eye opening responses from those two individuals.

The remainder of the interviews took place over the phone. Two of the participants set up a time and called me at that time to conduct the interview. The other two participants set up times on multiple occasions, but did not call me at the set time. It took multiple attempts to set up a meeting time before they actually connected with me. It was hard to tell if they did not make their meeting times because they were nervous or simply because they were busy. I did not want either of them to feel uncomfortable so I purposely did not ask them why they missed their agreed upon meetings. I also was careful to make sure they did not feel that missing their meetings was an issue or that I was upset about it in any way. They were doing me the favor and I wanted to make sure they felt respected and valued.

4.2 Participant Demographics

All of the participants were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-seven. This does not tie at all to dropout percentage rates per age group. The responses that were received from this question indicate that I need to continue to be aware that any themes or patterns may only apply to this age group and may or may not apply to other age groups.

The fact that there is an abundance of participants in the 18-22 category was mostly due to the available access I have to that age group (Fig. 1). In the future it is likely that I will concentrate my research efforts specifically on this age group. My hope is that focusing on this age group will help keep the data I collect current and relevant. Latino males leaving school before graduating has been an issue for a long time. Many of the reasons that it is still happening are the same as they have been for decades. I believe there are differences though and if we are going to prevent it from happening in the future we need to understand all of the current factors.

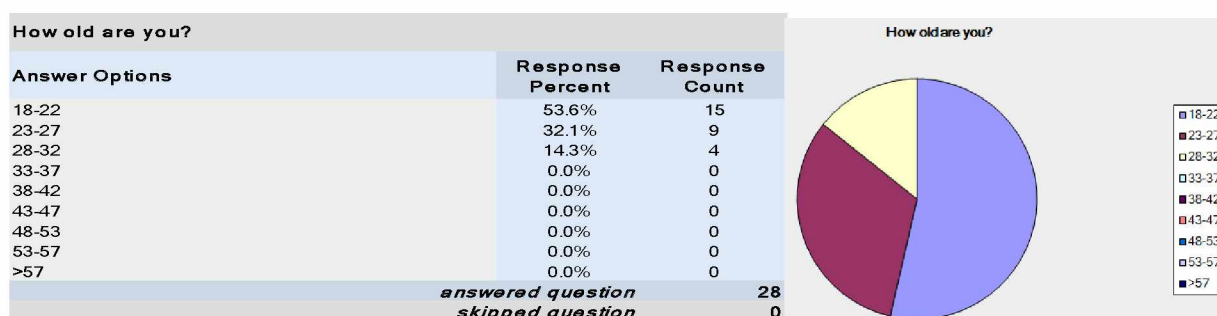


Fig. 1 Response Data Question 1

A majority of the participants were born in Illinois. Three were born in different states and five were born in Mexico. I was happy to see a mix in these areas. For this research I am looking for general themes and pattern so that I may refine future research that I conduct. One thing this data did tell me is that most of my participants were from lower income neighborhoods in the Chicago suburbs. (Fig. 2)

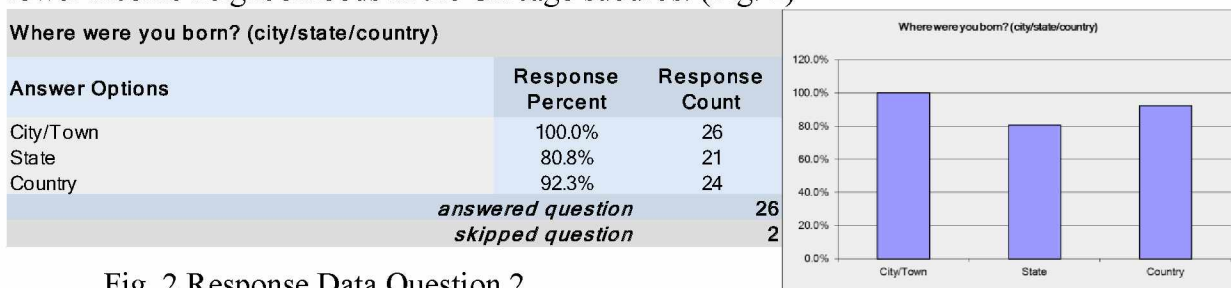


Fig. 2 Response Data Question 2

Most of the participants that were born in Mexico moved here at a very young age. The range was from one to seven years of age (Fig. 3). This fact leads me to believe that the impact of having been born in another country should be minimal. There were two participants that were of school age when they immigrated to the United States. I will be looking at the answers to other questions specifically for those two participants to see if there was an increased impact of having immigrated at a later age. (Fig. 3) This was a good place for me to start, but I will need to broaden future research to ensure that the factors I see in the data are not affected by region.

If you were born outside the U.S., how old were you when you immigrated to the U.S.?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
1	14.3%	1
2	14.3%	1
3	14.3%	1
6	14.3%	1
7	28.6%	2
<i>answered question</i>		7
<i>skipped question</i>		21

Fig. 3 Response Data Question 3

The graph in Fig. 16 shows that my participants left school in a 27 year time frame. When I perform research in the future I will narrow down my scope to include 5-10 years as times do change. My long-term goal is to pursue research that leads to identification of lesser known issues and curriculum and teaching methods that improve graduation rates for all Latino males. To do this I believe narrowing the scope will increase the relevance of my research. (Fig. 16)

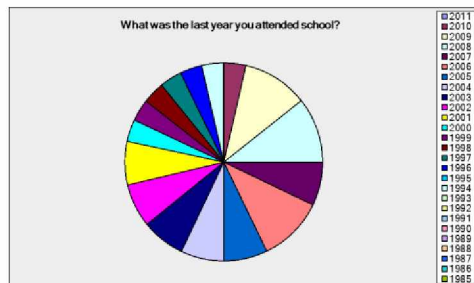


Fig. 16 Response Data Question 16

The data shows that over 75% of the participants left school between their sophomore and junior year of high school. Although the data from my research is not conclusive on why this is the case, the pattern will impact future research that I perform. I did not anticipate that the percentage of seniors would be the lowest. This data clearly shows that identifying issues in growth and development both socially and educationally must happen as early as possible. It is unlikely that one simple change or program will be able to change these numbers. (Fig. 17) I will need to increase the quantity of my participants in future surveys and expand the physical range of the participants to make certain that my results are not affected by region.

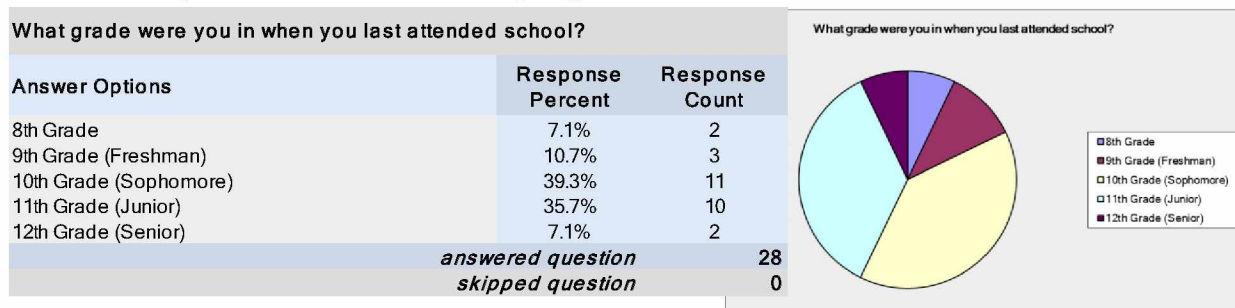


Fig. 17 Response Data Question 17

4.3 Theme 1 Socioeconomics

Socioeconomics continue to be one of the most predominant factors. The data further showed that home environment and community support systems play a role both inside and outside of the school environment. One of the subthemes evident in the data was that Latino male students that leave school before graduating often have disharmony at home or in their community in addition to issues in their school environment. One interviewee stated, “It was tough to hang out at home and I wasn’t doing well in school. I felt like hanging out with my friends and getting into trouble was better than that”

(Anonymous, 2012). This can be caused by relationships, the community environment, or specifically economics.

Finding employment opportunities is important to both families and for students who are trying to help out at home, save up money for college, or for starting their lives on their own. The first thing that jumps out at me from this data is that the participants took this survey in December when the unemployment rate was at approximately 8% yet the study shows an unemployment rate four times that (Historical Labor Force/United States, 2011). The literature review I performed before and during this research led me to believe there would be an increase, but I did not expect the percentage to be quite that high. If you take into account part time work nearly 65% of the participants were unable to find full-time employments (Fig. 4).

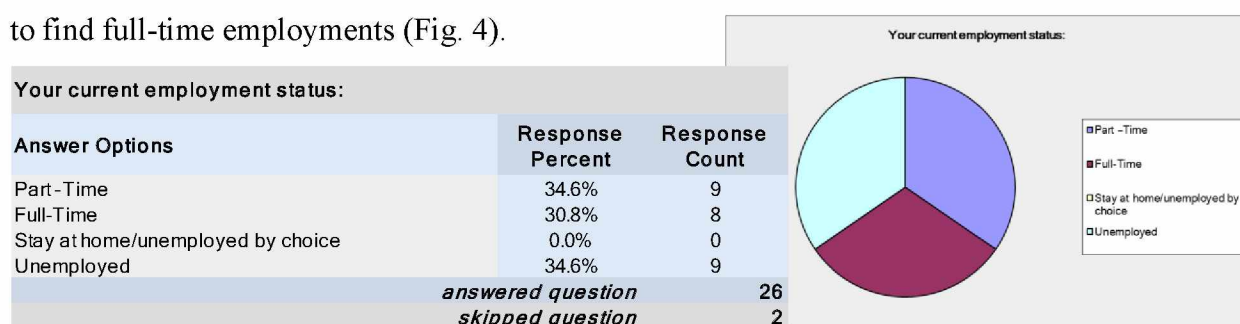


Fig. 4 Response Data Question 4

Employment status can be unique from family to family. If there are no jobs locally or if there a better jobs elsewhere parent(s) sometimes have to move to where the jobs are. One specific example given by an interview participant's spoke to the family having to move so that his mother could take a better job. Unfortunately, his mother was unable to afford housing in the town she found a job in so she had to search for housing possibilities in a nearby town that had less expensive housing. The interviewee painted a

memorable picture of the situation when he responded to being asked if there was housing available in the town where his mother's new job was located. He replied, "Yea but we couldn't afford them so the "heights" was the closest we could get to the job" (Anonymous, 2012). This is not only an issue in Illinois. Finding affordable housing near city centers, where most of the jobs are, can be a real challenge and sometimes impossible.

The data indicated that 73% of the participants needed to participate in the free lunch or reduced lunch programs that are available in their districts (Fig. 5). I did not see any major surprises here. This is very similar to what I observed while teaching in a school district with a high percentage rate of people of color. It is likely that these numbers may not truly reflect the need for free or reduced lunch as related to the participants in this study. Many parents will not sign their children up for free lunch or reduce-priced lunch even if they need it. The reasons for not doing so may vary and can range from pride, stigma with other students, or even from not knowing that the programs exist in the first place.

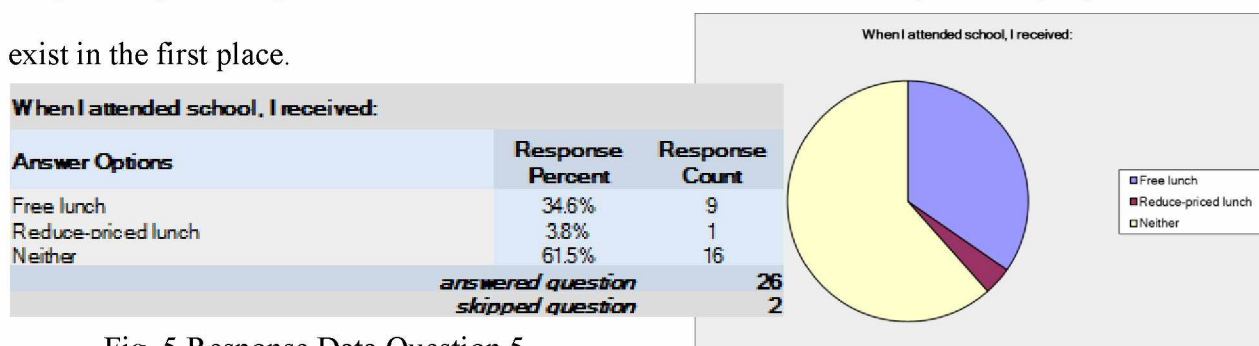


Fig. 5 Response Data Question 5

As it relates to preservation of culture I was happy to see that 100% of the participants used Spanish at home. I was discouraged to see that only 65% used any English at home. Given the reading and writing requirements that need to be met to

graduate high school, not speaking any English at home could definitely be a negative factor in their ability to complete K-12 education. (Fig. 6)

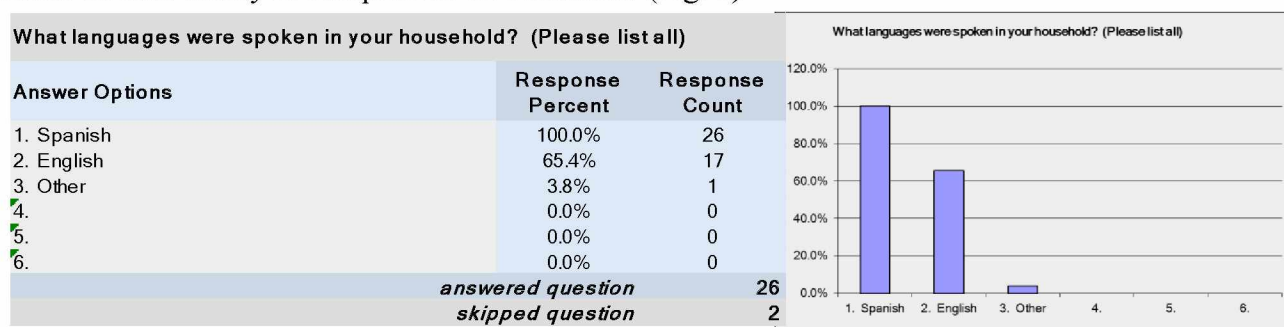


Fig. 6 Response Data Question 6

The responses to the survey showed that many of these participants have at least one parent that did not complete high school. None of the participants listed a mother that had completed a 4 year college degree (Fig. 8). Parents play a strong role in setting priorities for their children. Even when parents have a desire to see their children graduate, they often do not have the time to get involved in the child's education. I recall the story in "Lew (2004) that spoke of a student who left school well before graduating and the parents did not know." The student considered taking the GED in an effort to not disappoint them.

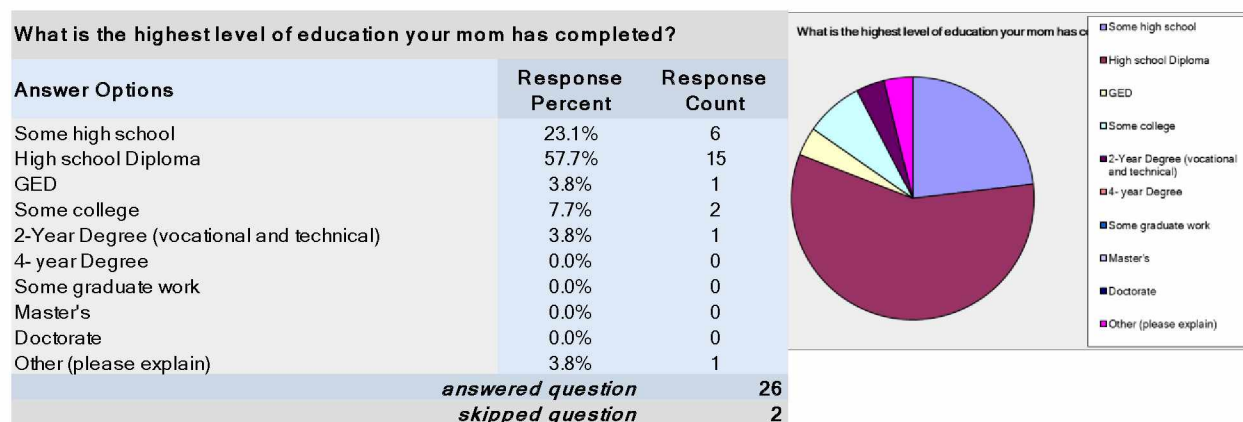


Fig. 8 Response Data Question 8

These results for the fathers were similar to those for the mothers. There are a couple of things here that caught my attention. There was a higher rate of fathers completing their GED in place of receiving their diploma. The other thing that stood out was that in the raw data some of the participants either stated they did not know if their father completed high school and in a couple cases stated they did not know their father at all (Fig. 9). Again, this is troubling when you consider a young man needing strong male role models.

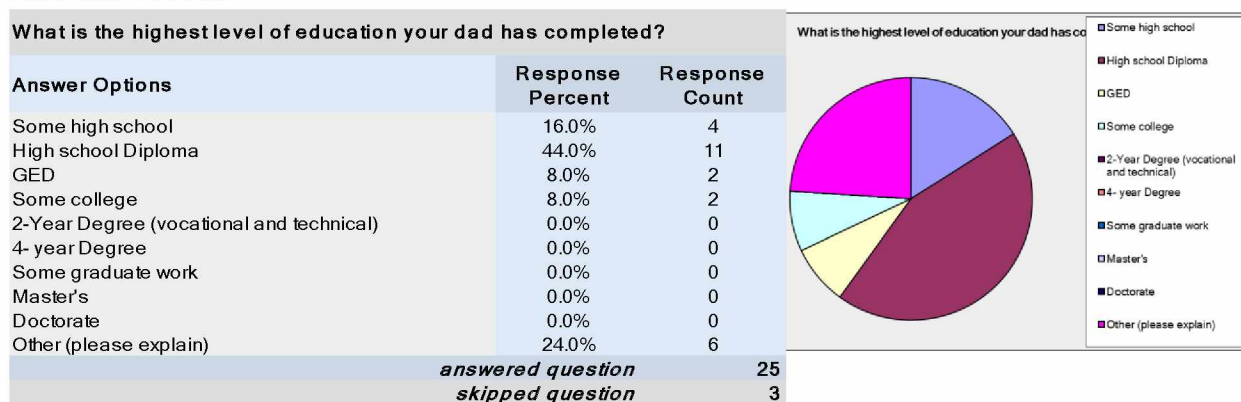


Fig. 9 Response Data Question 9

Less than half of the participants' parents completed high school. Most high paying jobs require a college degree and many jobs can be difficult to get without at least a certificate from a trade school or college (Fig. 9). The fact the most of the participants' parent achieved neither makes it much more likely that their household income would be lower. The amount of participants that were receiving lunch services further enforces that likelihood. When there are reduced resources in a family there are fewer resources to use on getting assistance or additional help for students. This has the ability to affect both their ability to finish high school and reduce their hope that they can financially afford college if they are able to complete high school.

Over 80% of the participants in the survey came from homes that did not have both parents at home due to death, separation, or divorce. Some of the participants eluded to money issues and fighting that led to the breakup of the relationships. A few of the participants in the interviews gave the impression that it was a subject they were not comfortable talking about. I would like to delve deeper into this factor in future research. Most of the participants that made up that percentage were living with their mother while going to school. In some cases both parents were home and/or there was a “live in” girlfriend, boyfriend, stepfather, or stepmother. Regardless of the living situation peace at home is important. Lack of peace in some cases had devastating results. One interview described his home situation by stating, “Hell going on at home and so I turned to the gang. I didn’t want to be around so decided to go somewhere” (Anonymous, 2012). He further explained that his parents fought all of the time and often he got stuck in the middle. Situations like those described by the research participants need to be improved for Latino males to be able to concentrate on school and be successful.

Over 40% of the participants in this survey did not have both parents living at home while attending school. The raw data showed that of that 40% almost all participants lived with their mothers if there was a breakup of the parents (Fig. 7). Mothers can be a great influence on young men. It is also important for them to have male role models as well. I will want to add more detailed questions on this subject to future surveys or interviews I conduct. I believe that this is a significant factor and worthy of extensive research.

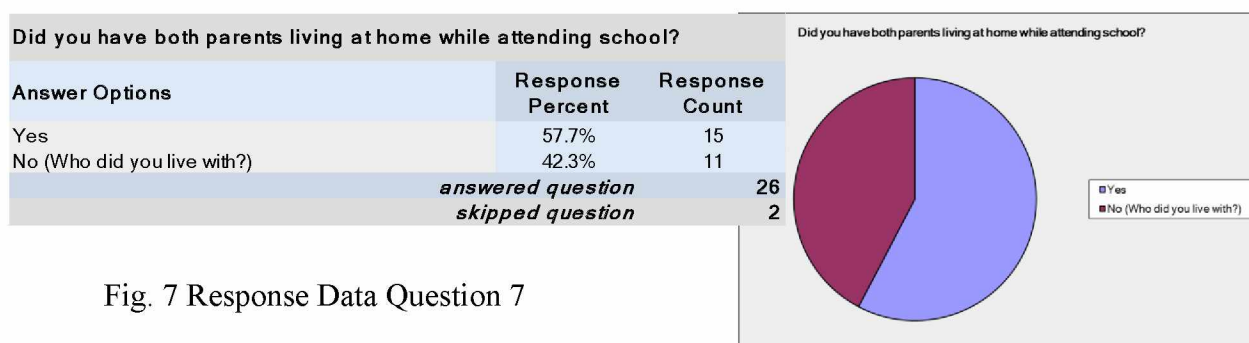


Fig. 7 Response Data Question 7

The survey I constructed did not specifically ask about the father's involvement in the participants' lives and education, but some of the expanded answers gave an indication that a father was not present or involved. One of the interview participants acknowledged this more specifically when he was asked what the highest level his dad completed in high school when he said, "I haven't seen my dad in a longtime, bro, so I don't know" (Anonymous, 2012). This was an uncomfortable topic to discuss for the participants in the interviews. They did not want to talk about it and I did not want to make them feel uncomfortable. I would like to explore this theme deeper in the future. Doing so will require a broader sampling and more specific questions. The question might be easier to answer in a survey instead of a face to face interview. Absence of a male role model could be a contributing factor to Latino males leaving school before graduating. Further, the study data revealed that few of the participants were able to obtain full-time jobs currently or even part-time jobs while attending high school. This fact could easily place them at a disadvantage for accumulating the financial resources required to help their own families or afford college if they did complete high school. Many families of color who are first or second generation find themselves in low paying menial jobs which offered limited income (Lew, 2004).

The data shows that most of the participants in the survey had large families at home (Fig. 19). If you couple this fact with the earlier data that showed that most did not have both parents at home it could lead you to believe that the amount of time and resources available could be significantly less than the time and resources available to students in smaller families. I grew up in a larger family with both parents at home. My father worked fulltime and for most of my youth my mom worked at home. Even with a fulltime mother at home she was often spread thin between daily house activities and the needs of my siblings and me. Having one parent at home could easily spread those resources thin.

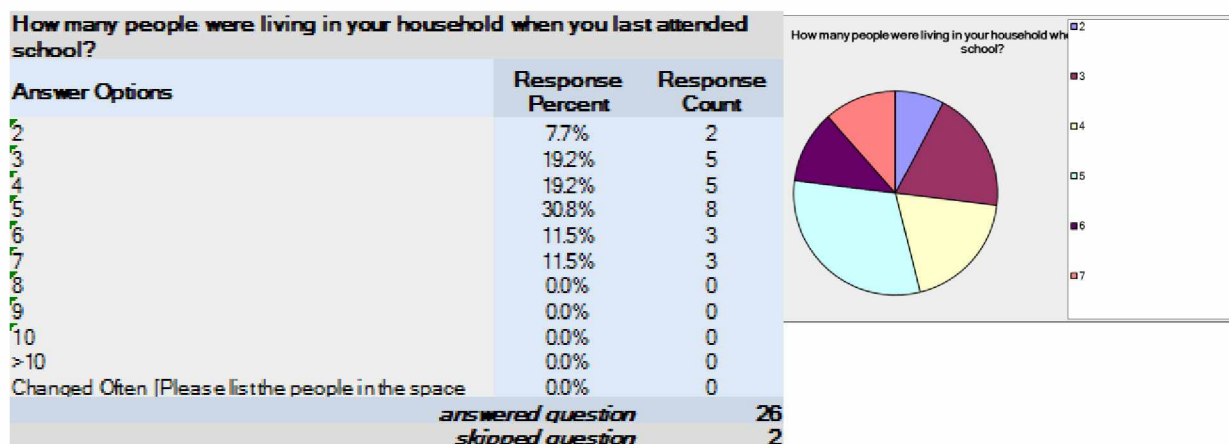


Fig. 19 Response Data Question 19

Only 20% of the study participants worked while they attended school. The raw data showed that 3 out of the 5 that did worked at pizza places. Although there is absolutely nothing wrong with working at a pizza place, I would like to see more work opportunities for Latino male students that allow them to make more money for school. I grew up in a middleclass “white collar” neighborhood that was mostly white. Call it location or “white privilege”, but business in the neighborhood would come to our high

school offering mentoring programs, jobs, and scholarships for working during the weekends, some week nights and summers. None of the participants mentioned any mentorship opportunities. The few who were able to find work were limited to grocery or pizza jobs. Opportunity is a valuable tool in reducing the rate of Latino males that leave school before graduating. (Fig. 21)

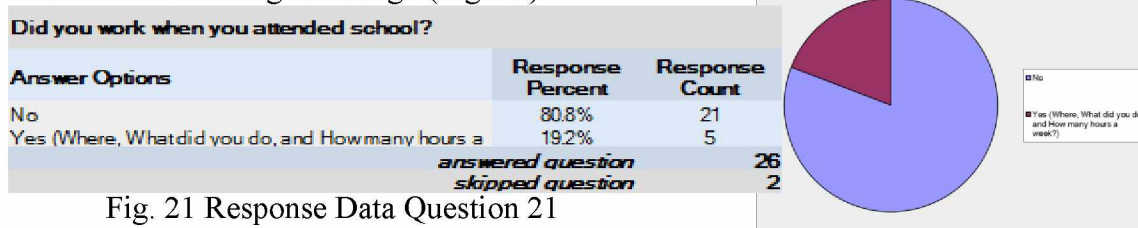


Fig. 21 Response Data Question 21

I was encouraged to see in the short responses that almost all of the participants had at least one parent who felt that education was important. It could have just been a coincidence, but most participants listed their mother as the person who felt education was important (Fig. 26). I think that is great, but also know that role models and father son relationships are very important for all men. Other data from the study yielded that most of the participants' parents were divorced and that they were living with their mothers. It is imperative that Latino males feel that both parents find education equally important so that their success in school is a priority for the entire family. The data showed in many cases that the participants were living in single parent households. That data implies that in some if not all of the cases those participants did not have both parents around to reinforce the importance of education to their future.

What are your family's views about education? (Please explain)	
Answer Options	Response Count
	24
answered question	24
skipped question	4

Fig. 26 Response Data Question 26

Drugs and gangs are not isolated to areas with less income. They are often more prevalent in areas of less income. The response from one participant when asked if he felt pressure to do drugs was, “I do not know if it was pressure. It was just around...you know. My friends had it so we did it” (Anonymous, 2012). When you couple an availability of drugs and gangs with financial pressures which can place additional stress on families, it is not surprising that Latino males sometimes turn to drugs or gangs as a way to escape or survive. Once headed down that road it is increasingly difficult to change the pattern. When one of the participants was asked in an interview why he joined a gang he expressed his thoughts by sharing, “I wasn’t doing good in school and then I got in trouble for drugs. They (school administration) wanted to send me to another school and I decided not to go. So....I started hangin out with my brothers and eventually I joined up” (Anonymous, 2012). His statement did more than just concern me that he decided to join a gang. There was something in the way he said it. He said it in a way you would expect to hear from a student deciding to join an extra club after school. The tone in his voice conveyed an absence of hope for something better than a gang lifestyle. I knew this interviewee personally and he has a lot of potential. As I perform future research, there is a greater likelihood that I will not have personal connections to the participants. I will keep my interaction with this participant in mind to remind me that anytime a young adult does not graduate it is potential lost.

Several short answers in the survey responses showed some concern for the participants leaving school, but I was concerned with the number of responses that showed a lack of concern or indifference (Fig. 27). I am not in any way implying that the

parents did not care, but that leaving school before graduating may be an unfortunate reality for too many people in that neighborhood or family. We all share responsibility in improving the availability of positive educational opportunities for all students. The interviews and survey data showed me that in many cases the students had a strong desire to be successful and graduate. What some of the responses showed was that it was not always an expectation. One participant spoke to this when he said, “it wasn’t really a big surprise that I didn’t graduate, it was more like if I was going to get kicked out or leave first” (Anonymous, 2012). Another participant said, “A lot of my friends dropped out, I didn’t think it was a big deal if I did it too. The dean didn’t act like it mattered much either” (Anonymous, 2012). Parents and students should be able to have an expectation that they will finish high school as well as that they will have a choice as to if they want to attend college or not.

What did your family say/do when you left school? (Please explain)	
Answer Options	Response Count
	23
<i>answered question</i>	23
<i>skipped question</i>	5

Fig. 27 Response Data Question 27

4.4 Theme 2 School Environment

School environment appeared to be a solid factor in the participants’ decision to leave school before graduating. The overall response to teachers, faculty, and classes was overwhelmingly negative. Many of my questions in my survey could be interpreted as community level questions such as gangs or drugs, but in retrospect based on the answers I received I should have expanded my question base on community environment and possibly focused a little less attention specifically on school environment.

Schools rely heavily on funding and community support. It is not impossible to have great support for a school in a low income neighborhood, but it is probably more difficult to find time and resources to support the schools if you are struggling to put food on the table or keep a roof over your family's heads. The data in the survey indicates that many of the participants lived in homes with one parent providing both financial support and care for the children. This could make expanded school participation difficult if not impossible for parents even if they are interested in helping. The overall impact to the school environment can be two-fold. Not only may the schools not have enough funding, but they are probably less like to have the money to fund positions that could work on writing grants and searching out funds.

It is immediately evident looking at the data that there is a lack of people of color in principal roles at the schools the participants attended. I was slightly encouraged to see a higher number of people of color in Teacher and Guidance Counselor positions than had been expected (Fig. 10). This left me with some questions on how the participants interpreted "Mixed". This data may also assist in showing patterns related to later questions in the study as to how the participants in this study interpreted their treatment at the schools they attended. Even without that data taken into consideration, it is fair to say that the administration at the school did not reflect the student population very well. The fact that none of the principals were of color does not imply that they were not good at what they do, but it could imply that they may not be as sensitive to needs of their student population. In future research I will add additional questions on this topic to clarify if this had specific impact from the participants' point of view. I could say that the negative

impact is shown by the dissatisfaction with school staff that was evident in the survey and interview data, but I need more definitive answers to support that position properly.

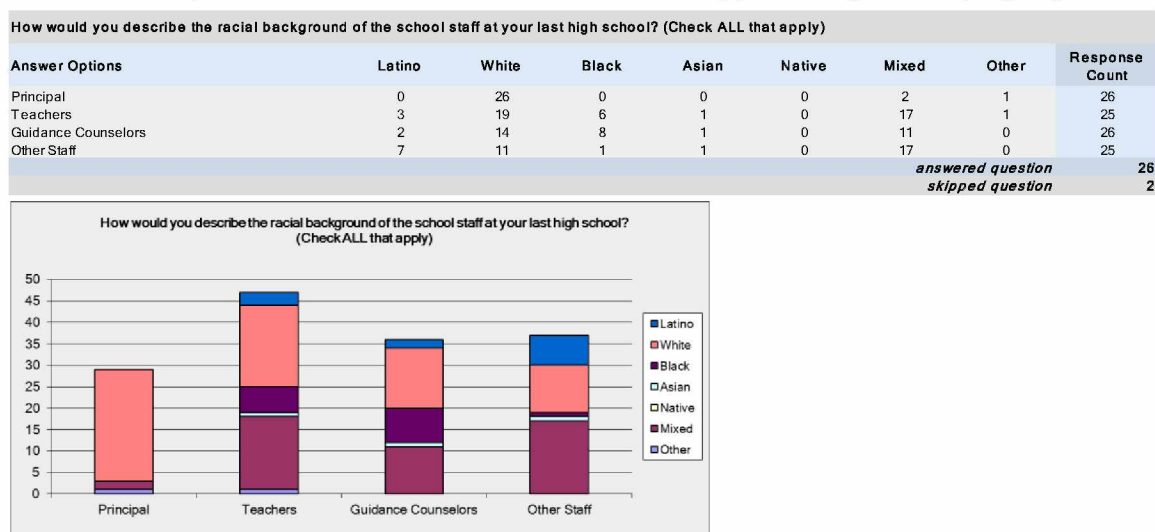


Fig. 10 Response Data Question 10

Students sometimes need correction, but that needs to be handed out with a plan to change behavior. Some of the participants felt that they did not stand a chance. This was reflected when one of the participants expressed that his least favorite memory of school was the students deans. In his own words he stated, “The deans. They did not like me at all. I pretty much couldn’t say a word without getting in trouble” (Anonymous, 2012). A fellow interview participant mirrored his sentiment when he expressed, “I didn’t have a chance with my background. I came in on the second strike. Dean said if I did anything he would kick me out on our first meeting. It upset me and I didn’t feel welcome” (Anonymous, 2012). I will speak more about this in when talking about stereotyping and discrimination. The reason I included these quotes in this section was to show the overlap and correlation of discrimination being part of the school environment. Attending a school that has discrimination as part of the daily environment

could be especially damaging for the participants in this study and other students of color. This factor added to other negative factors related to school environment, could create a hostile environment that is not conducive to the success of students.

The data shows there was a mix of students of color and those who are not at the schools the participants attended (Fig. 11). This further reinforces my assertion that the administration of the schools may not have properly reflected their student populations. It is not always possible to find candidates that reflect the community. That does not mean that we should not try to do so.

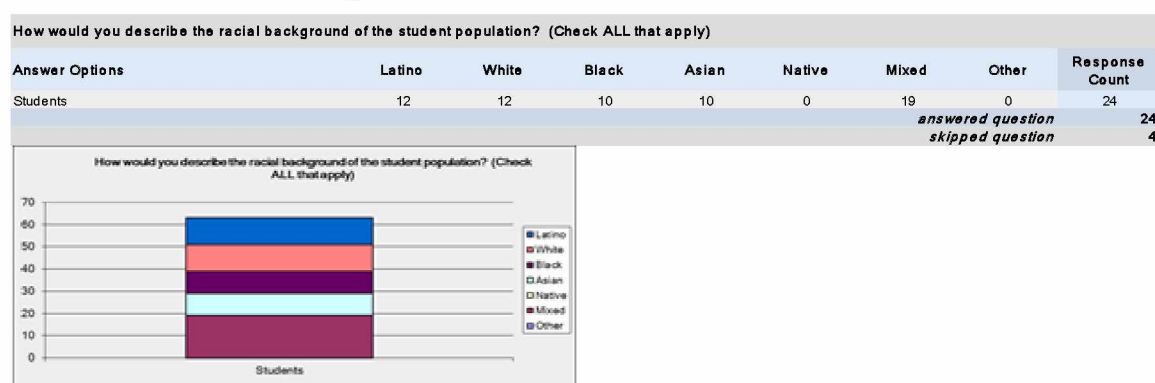


Fig. 11 Response Data Question 11

Approximately 15% of the study participants shared a positive or somewhat positive viewpoint of their school staff. Almost 25% of the students had a negative or somewhat negative view of their school staff. I am most interested why 46% responded neutral (Fig. 12). I attempted to clarify the responses by allowing an answer for “Mixed”. The responses I see, in my opinion, are inconclusive as they are similar to what I would expect from any sampling of students that left school before graduating. One of the participants did mention that, “All the deans were “really white” and I am pretty sure they didn’t live in the area”. When asked what he meant he said, “Well their rides (cars) were

too nice to be living around here” (Anonymous, 2012). Although that information was interesting, I think this is an important factor and that I could construct questions that better explore this issue. I will have to be more specific in future studies and research that I pursue.

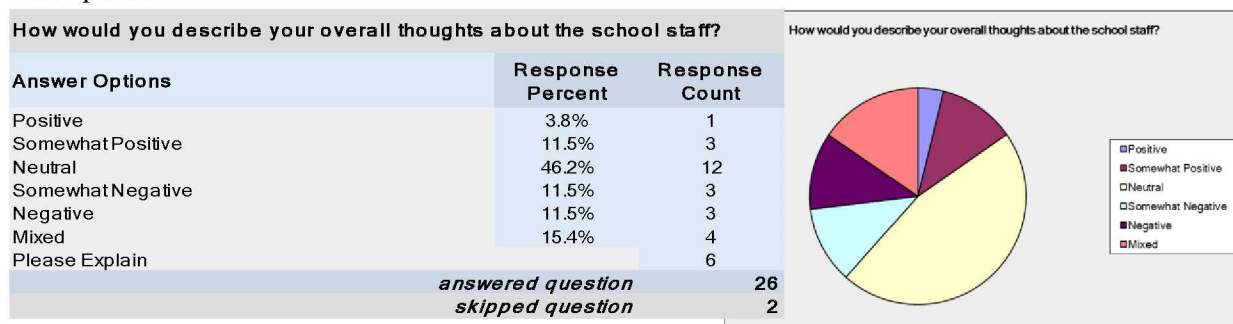


Fig. 12 Response Data Question 12

Even though my survey responses on this subject were inconclusive the interview results did reveal a few things. The first is that in some case students wanted help, but did not receive it. When asked what the school could have done better he shared, “They could have helped me with my writing and school work. I can speak English ok, but can’t write it good” (Anonymous, 2012). This is good example of a student that wanted help, but that could not find it in his school environment. Educational institutions need to communicate with their student populations. Test scores are not the only method for determining what services students need.

These number show that 11% of the students did not feel they were treated respectfully. In some of the expanded survey responses and in the interviews many students mentioned that they were thought of as a “bad” kid or a “trouble maker”. Respect is a critical factor in the success of students. The 38% who listed their experience as neutral is of interest to me (Fig. 13). Students need to achieve mutual

respect with their teachers if they are going to perform well in their classes. The raw data showed that some of the students did not feel that their teachers liked them or that some of them thought they were bad. Specifically one interview participants mentioned, “If something bad happened they assumed I had something to do with it, even if I didn’t have anything to do with it. I spent a lot of time in the office and after school for detention” (Anonymous, 2012). There should never be an assumption that a student is “bad” even if they have exhibited unfavorable behaviors in the past.

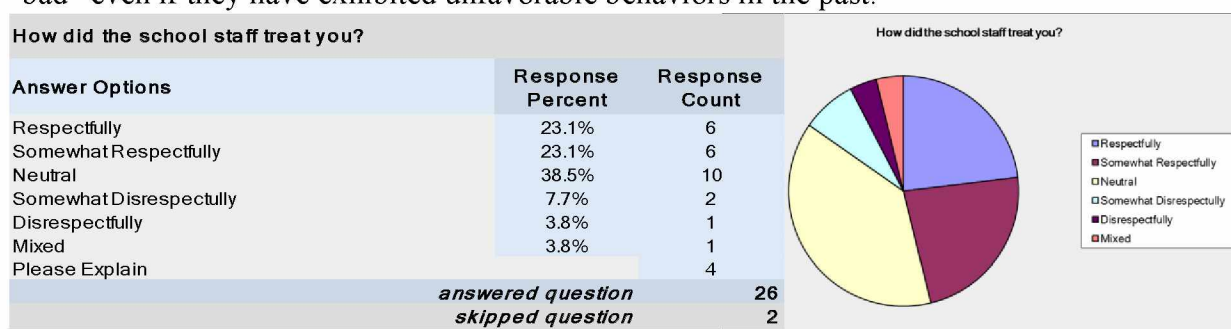


Fig. 13 Response Data Question 13

Nearly 70% of the participants described their classes as negative or somewhat negative (Fig. 14). The raw data yielded feelings that the classes were “Too hard and that teachers treated them as if they were stupid.” These results could indicate that curriculum was not in tune with the students’ needs, that teaching techniques may not be working with learning styles, that students were not placed properly in classes, or that there possibly may have been a lack of support or an inability to support the students with their studies at home. An interview participant described it in the following way, “My mom was never around. She was always working or sleeping when she wasn’t working. It was my responsibility to make sure my brothers were fed and that they went to bed. There was no time to get all the crap they wanted me to get done for school”

(Anonymous, 2012). Taking on adult responsibilities can be a lot of pressure for a young person trying to be successful in school.

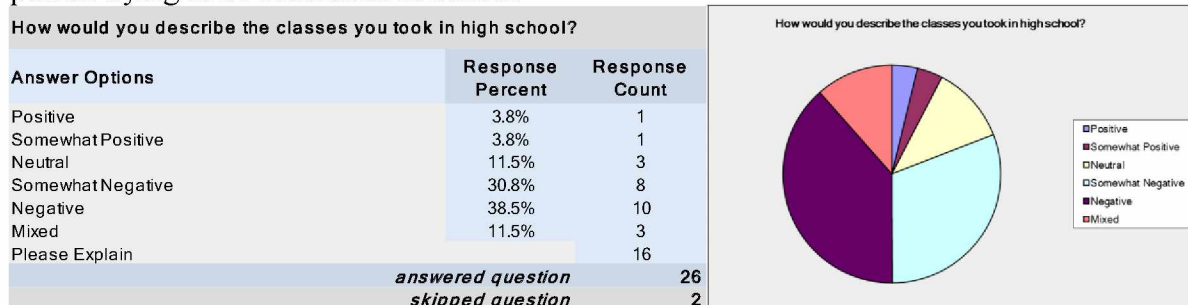


Fig. 14 Response Data Question 14

All students should feel safe in school (Fig. 15). The study data showed that 7.7% of the participants in the survey did not. Some of the details in the raw data revealed concerns over fighting and being teased while at school. There is no doubt that a hostile school environment has negative consequences when it comes to the education of any child. If students are to be successful they need to feel safe in their homes, communities, and classrooms.

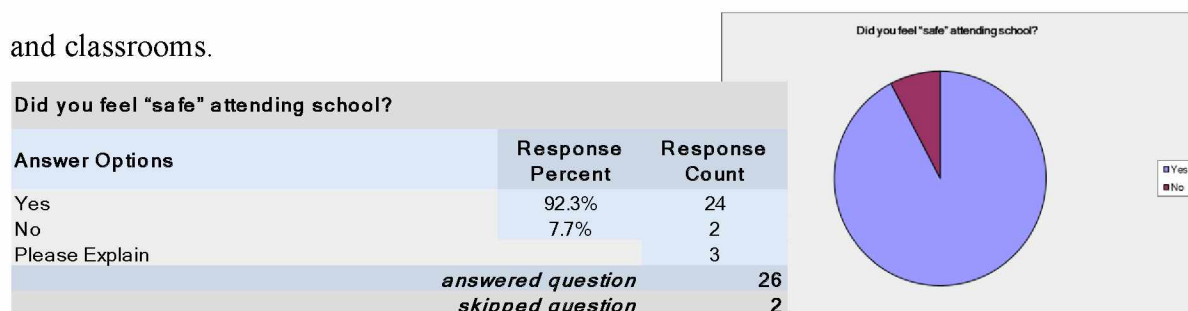


Fig. 15 Response Data Question 15

A positive attendance record is important factor in student success. It is difficult for students to keep up, especially with all of the standards, if they are not in the classroom. I made one mistake in preparing this study question. I should have offered the participants the option of choosing zero for the categories. This error may give a false perception of the degree to which these participants were missing class. The data

does however show a large number of the participants missed more than 5 days, had more than 5 tardies, or had days missed due to skipping class (Fig. 18). One interview participant described his reason for skipping school by saying, “I was going to fail even if I was there so it was like who cares” (Anonymous, 2012). This still sufficiently shows attendance to be a factor in my opinion.

What was your attendance record?						
How many absences per year?						
Answer Options	Under 5	5-10	11-20	20-25	Over 25	Response Count
Estimate	6	11	6	1	2	26
How many tardies per year?						
Answer Options	Under 5	5-10	11-20	20-25	Over 25	Response Count
Estimate	13	8	3	2	0	26
How many classes did you skip per year?						
Answer Options	Under 5	5-10	11-20	20-25	Over 25	Response Count
Estimate	16	3	4	1	0	24
						Question Totals
						answered question 26
						skipped question 2

Fig. 18 Response Data Question 18

Although some of the participants did participate in sports and extracurricular activities nearly 70% percent did not. Extracurricular activities can be a positive place for students to meet people, make friends, find mentors, and even obtain scholarships. The 30% of the participants in the survey that were involved participated in band, baseball, wrestling, basketball, and soccer (Fig. 20). The lack of involvement from the 70% is concerning, but the 30% who are involved show that this is an area for

improvement that schools could work on in the future.

Did you participate in sports or extracurricular activities in school?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
No	69.2%	18
Yes (Please List)	30.8%	8
		answered question 26
		skipped question 2

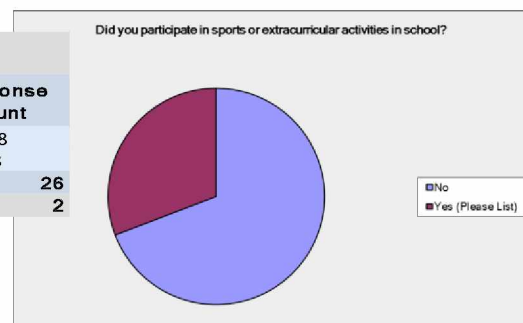


Fig. 20 Response Data Question 20

I agree that academics are the main priority for a school, but I do not see the benefit of using grades only as a qualifier as to if students can participate. There was a great example of this in one specific set of responses I was given in an interview. When the participant was asked if he was involved in any extracurricular activities he responded, “I tried wrestling, but had to drop because of grades”. I followed up by asking if he had ever tried anything else. He expanded on his answer with, “No, after that I didn’t care” (Anonymous, 2012). His grades were not going to allow him to stay eligible so in his mind there was no point in trying another one.

The community and school should care for him. Students need positive outlets for their time and energy. If we do not supply them or take them away without careful consideration those same students may fill that time with activities that are destructive to themselves and their communities. I understand that sometimes district or state rules have an impact on the situation. If grades keep some students out of competitive state sports, we need to make sure they that there are clubs and intermural sports to fill that gap. One interview participant noted, “My dean didn’t let me go to prom. He didn’t want me there, period” (Anonymous, 2012). This interviewee was made to feel unwanted from his very first meeting with his dean. Denying access to extracurricular activities can damage a student’s desire to participate in school on any level. School and communities need to find a way to include all students, even if that means creating new clubs or sponsoring sports they did not previously offer. The interviewee stated a good case on his own when he speculated, “I wish I could have stayed in wrestling and maybe I wouldn’t have gotten in as much trouble” (Anonymous, 2012)

Drugs and alcohol are both issues in many high schools or even grade schools. Keeping kids from trying them can be difficult when they are readily available in most communities. Over 30% of the participants in my study had felt direct pressure to try drugs (Fig. 22). The raw data showed that most were receiving that pressure from friends and that the pressure was to try “pot” or alcohol. There are programs in most communities designed to discourage the use of drugs. This data shows that it is important that materials from these programs need to be made available in Spanish based on the number of participants that stated it was their primary and in some cases only language at home.

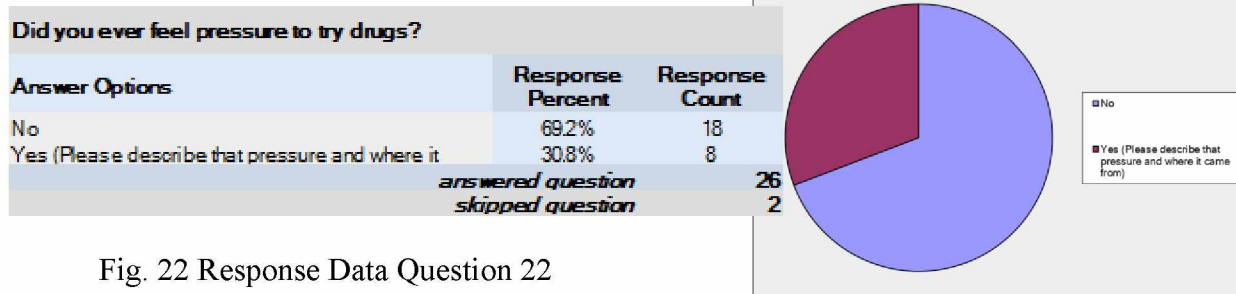


Fig. 22 Response Data Question 22

Both the raw data and the graphs for this question tell an interesting story. The graph shows that 54% of the participants had tried or used drugs even though only 30% felt pressure to do so. I believe that these conflicting percentages can be explained in a couple of ways. The first is that the raw data leads me to believe that trying drugs was just part of growing up. Answers like “I was 13 and my friends like to drink” reinforce that conclusion (Fig. 23). Another observation that struck me was the casual nature of most of the expanded responses. I am not sure if from the participants’ perspective that answered yes, that they felt it was a big deal. This attitude could be due to conditions in their neighborhood, schools, or lack of anti-drug curriculum that is effective. The

disciplinary actions handed out were often devastating. One participant remarked that, “after getting in trouble for drugs, I knew I wasn’t going to graduate after that” (Anonymous, 2012). High school students are still growing and learning. They are going to make mistakes. One mistake with drugs should not have consequences that make the student feel like their chance of finishing school is impossible. That is not the message we want to send even while being tough on drugs in the school.

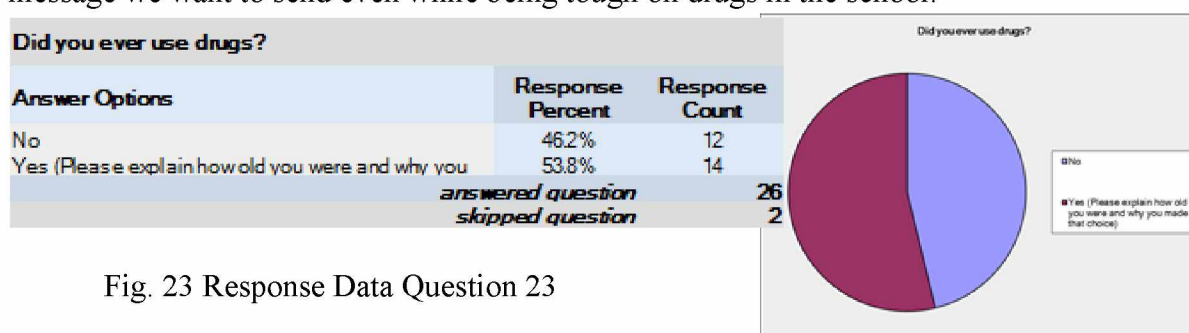


Fig. 23 Response Data Question 23

Another factor that was evident in the data was the pressure to join gangs (Fig. 24). Even though my survey only included 28 participants one child is a number too high to accept. Children and young adults of any color often have significant pressure and challenges while growing up. Gang pressure should not be part of that equation in any community. The fact that the raw study data shows that not only friends, but actually family members are causing this pressure is a major red flag. In some cases there were overlapping factors. One participant noted, “I was 12 or 13 and the whole gang was hangin out and stuff and everyone was handin out beers so I had one” (Anonymous, 2012). This was a specific example of gang and drug pressure wrapped up into one. Fitting in with the gang is very important to gang members.

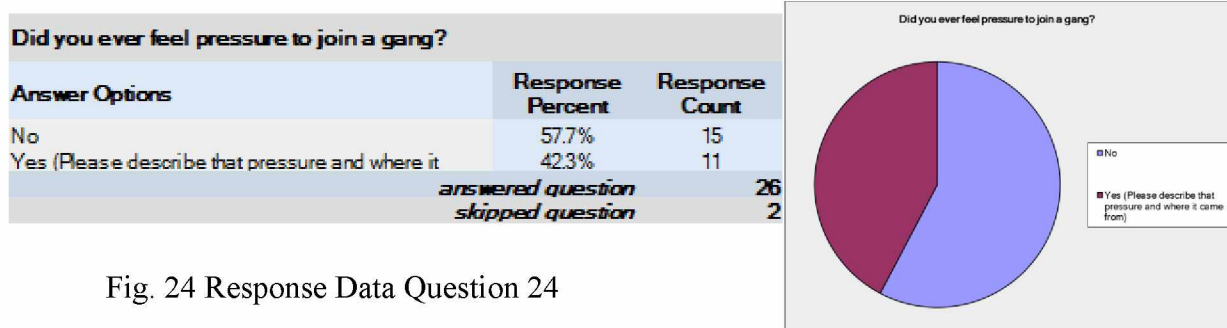


Fig. 24 Response Data Question 24

The level of pressure to join gangs is also disturbing. The fact that 7 participants in this study actually did is unacceptable (Fig. 25). Gangs can offer young Latino males a sense of belonging and brotherhood, but more times than not gangs lead to violence and prison time. “Vigil (2002) tells the story of Huc who did not feel wanted by his family and committed crimes to make money in hope of being accepted.” Gang life offered him the extended family he was looking for. Membership in a gang does not mean it is too late to positively affect the outcome for a young Latino male. It does have the potential to complicate the situation and make it less likely that you will be able to reach them and help them find their way back to school or a successful future.

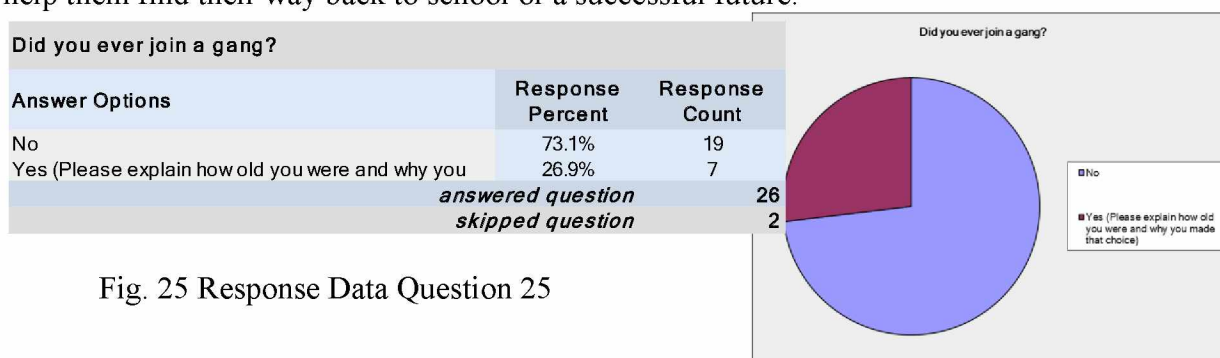


Fig. 25 Response Data Question 25

Participants conveyed for the most part that their classmates were indifferent or that in some cases even happy or jealous that they left school (Fig. 28). I worked in a school district with a high percentage of people of color. The relationships and friendships among students are strong. Based on those experiences, I do not believe that

these responses show a lack of caring. These responses do not show an expectation that all students will finish high school and have the opportunity to attend college. A specific response stuck in my head for this topic. I had asked one of the participants what the reaction was to him leaving school. He said, “Nothin, they (his teachers and family) knew it was going to happen” (Anonymous, 2012). That is what we must all work on changing if these students are going to ever enjoy the opportunities for success that people that are not of color often take for granted. Every student should assume the will complete high school and have opportunities to be whatever they can dream of being.

How did the school staff and classmates at your school react when you decide to leave school? (Please explain)	
Answer Options	Response Count
	25
<i>answered question</i>	25
<i>skipped question</i>	3

Fig. 28 Response Data Question 28

4.5 Theme 3 Stereotyping and Discrimination

Looking at the survey results also led me to consider something else I had not thought of. It is possible for stereotyping and discrimination to become prevalent enough that is merely accepted as the way things are. Many of the responses that the participants gave in the area of reaction from family, staff, and friends gave me the impression that this is how things are. That is normal or in some cases alright for students to not complete their high school education. I discovered an undertone of realism not based on how things should be, but how things are.

Based on all of the data I collected I found out that stereotyping and discrimination was not a theme of its own. I found it to be more so the glue that bound

together socioeconomic and school environmental factors. Both stereotyping and discrimination were tools used to perpetuate the negative factors that I encountered in both my literature reviews and in my research data. As I was placing responses into banks to be used to support the themes of socioeconomics and school environments, I found myself being able to use the factors that I placed in this bank to support both negative factors in school environment and in socioeconomics. In the future I will pursue this as less of an independent theme and more so as the foundation for the other factors. I will talk more about this realization in my conclusion.

Although I used many of the interview responses to support socioeconomic and school environment factors the support was so strong that I had an enormous amount of quotes left over. The following statements I believe stand on their own so I want to be careful not to drown them in obvious analysis. These statements all came from one on one interviews and were in response to questions that asked about experiences with school environment. “They decided I was a bad kid so I spent a lot of time in the office”, “Sometimes I felt like they grouped us together just because we were Mexican”, “Some teachers did treat us different, some expected nothing of you...looking for the ‘stereotype’. They automatically had that vibe for you and you were stuck with it”, “I got out after two weeks and the dean started threatening me to be locked up if I was late for school”, “I was bounced around so much and out of school so much that I could never get caught back up.”, “I did not feel like I belonged there.”, and “I wasn’t doing well and I don’t think anyone gave a S__ _!” (Anonymous, 2012)

It is important that communities and schools find a way to combat stereotyping and discrimination. If they do not, both have the ability to undermine any positive policies or programs that are put into place. It is important that high school diplomas for Latino males become the norm. The choice of going to college, entering the military, or learn a trade is should actually be a choice and not something that is decided simply based on race or ethnic background. Success needs to become common and failure needs to be the exception.

Section 5 Conclusions

When asked if leaving high school will affect their future 73% of the Latino male participants responded “yes” (Fig. 30). As a result, most of the participants understand the value the education they did not receive. The expanded responses I received from participants are a virtual collection of the wide variety of circumstances that lead to students leaving school before graduating. Bad grades, pregnancy, family needs, gangs, and loss of hope (Fig. 29). There was a common theme among the interviewees in the form of pressure. You could tell many of them felt the weight of the world on their shoulders while they were going to school. Some of them mentioned specifically that they were expected to take care of siblings or that they felt unable to keep their grades up. The answers speak to me as an educator, community member, and a human being. Many of the answers convey a troubling reality that these young adults should not be burdened with. They show me failures in curriculum, schools, communities, and in some cases support from family and friends. There is no one source to blame. The variety reinforces my opinion that there is no simple program that can be put in place. Correcting these issues is going to take time, patience, and support from everyone in the community.

Do you feel that leaving school before you graduated high school will affect your future?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
No	26.9%	7
Yes	73.1%	19
Please explain why or why not		22
answered question		26
skipped question		2

Fig. 30 Response Data Question 30

Describe your reasons for leaving school? For example, financial (responsibilities/lack of money), social (peer	
Answer Options	Response Count
	26
answered question	26
skipped question	2

Fig. 29 Response Data Question 29

When you take into account the many factors that have the potential to “pull” students like Jose and Fernando away from school, it is easy to see where even a gentle nudge towards the door could significantly tip the scales. School environment plays a major role in the fact that Latino males “are more likely to drop out of high school and more likely not to finish college” (Oguntoyinbo, 2009, p.14). The educational environment needs to be a safe place where students can develop a passion for learning. It needs to be a place where they can develop socially. There needs to be policies in place that offer both consequences and opportunities for growth after an issue has been identified.

There is always one positive when you are able to identify a major issue. Once you have discovered it there is an opportunity to improve or fix it. Researching students of color leaving school before graduation and specifically as that applies to Latino males is just that kind of opportunity. There is an abundance of research on the subject and some major breakthroughs are taking place. In the article “An Early Warning System” Neild, Balfanz, & Herzog (2007) present research that shows an unbiased approach to identify students who are likely to leave school early. They identified the following factors that can assist in identifying students by the 9th grade: A final grade of F in Mathematics, a final grade of F in English, attendance below 80 percent for a year, or a final “unsatisfactory” behavior mark in at least one class (Neild, et al., 2007, p. 29). Their research showed that 80% of the dropouts they studied in Philadelphia had exhibited one of those factors by middle school or at least by the 9th grade. Knowing that

information is one thing, but what can we do about it? One positive approach to the issue comes from a not so likely source.

The United States has been experiencing these issues, especially as related to people of color, for decades. In Denmark, however, this is a somewhat recent development and that has led them to look at the situation with a modern viewpoint from the early stages of the issue. This issue of an increased presence of people of color in their country led to the government of Denmark commissioning a study that was geared towards the goals of better identifying the factors involved and providing suggestions for policy changes that could improve the situation. Their resulting suggestions that were implemented were: Minority youth will in the future be offered lessons in Danish as a second language at vocational schools, Incoming minority students will be offered a mentor who is an older minority student at the school, Vocational schools with large numbers of minority students will target their efforts to ensure these students obtain an apprenticeship with a private company, and A task force has been appointed to investigate the possibility of restructuring the curriculum in vocational schools. (Colding, Hummelgaard, & Husted, 2006, p. 693) All schools were expected to offer multiple language opportunities to their students as well. The fact that these mandates were tailored to fit the situation specifically in Denmark does not diminish their validity to minority students in other countries and could easily work with minor adjustments in the United States.

Current research is leading to even further breakthroughs in understanding impact and the creation of policies and practices that have the potential to improve the situation

dramatically. We cannot, however, become complacent. There is a lot more work to be done. A majority of the research that has been conducted has been quantitative.

Although this is an important endeavor and should continue, I believe that a wide variety of additional qualitative research needs to take place to better understand the students that are affected.

As I discussed in this literature review, improved test scores do not necessarily indicate a school is heading in the right direction. It could simply mean that minority students with low test scores are being pushed out earlier than ever before. It is important to continue research that gets down to the community and student level so that the current status of Latino male students can be evaluated and the real success of current programs that target them can be assessed. I see a need for researchers to sit down and talk to young Latino males that are currently going through the school systems as well as older Latino males that have been through the system to better understand the “push and pull” that is leading to the high number of them that are leaving school before graduating. Once we have added to the research data, we need to persuade communities that schools can be adjusted to meet the needs of all students (Brogdon, 1992). This can be accomplished by opening lines of communication within the community. Sharing research findings and working together to produce creative solutions that are tailor made to meet the needs of students while utilizing local resources are the keys to success.

This issue has solutions. It is not that non-minority students do not have some of these same obstacles to overcome; it is simply that minority students like those in my research are much more likely to have more of these obstacles. One of the great perks of

solving research problems for a “worst case scenario” is that the findings and solutions can benefit all people who experience these issues regardless of gender, race, or culture. There are no quick fixes, but I have no doubt the answers are there and the resources can be made available to make a difference.

Angel and Ramone, who I made reference to earlier, “passed the state-wide, high stakes high school exit exams” yet decided to leave school without graduating anyway (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009, p. 225). Fernando, Jose, Angel, and Ramone all went to different schools, but felt the same lack of value in their school environment. The school environment for Latino male students must be improved if we are going to lower the number who leave before graduating. It will require improvements in administration, curriculum and teachers to be successful. Community involvement to make sure that the needs of all students are being met is a critical factor.

I am more convinced than ever that the complexity of this issue is huge, but that understanding that allows you to address issues in a systematic way. I have no doubt that these issues exist for any person of color, but how they manifest themselves in different communities or how they affect different cultures may vary wildly. I am looking forward to gaining more details from individuals and am learning that studying Latino males is the tip of the iceberg if I want to provide information that makes a difference. All students who are failing to complete high school need to be researched. Understandably they all need to be studied in ways that take into account their culture, but the results of all need to be studied as a whole so that solutions can be created based on the needs of

individual schools and communities. This will allow all students to benefit regardless of the color of their skin.

There is much more research that needs to be done. I am convinced that there are a wide variety of solutions that may help. The most important thing that I learned is that we need to let the students who left school before graduating teach us what they have learned. Constructing the findings and analysis portion of my thesis allowed me to evaluate the questions I asked and gave me ideas of how to refine them in the future. It is essential to ask the right question so that participants can better expand on their experiences. They have a voice if you are willing to listen. While trying to listen for that voice I heard one response to a question that will stick with me forever. When asked, one Latino male participant who found his way out of the gang lifestyle responded to being asked what he wished for the future by saying, “Not judge me by how I look and not judge me by my color and tattoos. I tried to remove them. I went to places but it was too expensive. I wish they didn’t judge me as a look. They should understand me. Maybe someday I will come up with the cash to do it, but I’m not sure it matters. Even if I get them removed I will still get treated like a Mexican” (Anonymous, 2012). No human being of any color should have to feel that way. We have a lot of work to do in our schools, communities, and countries to change the outcome for these individuals that have been affected by ignorance. We owe it to them and future generations.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey Questions

Socioeconomic factors that lead to Latino males leaving high school before

1. General Information

Thank you for taking the time to access and complete this survey. My name is Joe D'Agostino and I am a graduate student in the School of Education at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. I taught in Glendale Heights, Illinois, a community with a large Latino community, for 3 years. I want to learn more about what are the social and economic reasons that lead to Latino males not finishing high school. I hope to offer some recommendations that could help reduce the rising numbers. This is an anonymous survey. In other words, no one will know who you are and your identity.

You will have the option to participate in a follow-up interview (please see details listed at the end of this survey). If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact my advisor or me directly. Thank you for your participation.

Joe D'Agostino
University of Alaska Fairbanks (Masters Candidate)
E-mail: jcdagostino@alaska.edu
Phone: (202) 642-6665

Dr. Anjela Wong
University of Alaska Fairbanks (Professor/Advisor)
E-mail: nawong@alaska.edu
Phone: (907) 474-5516

1. How old are you?

2. Where were you born? (city/state/country)

City/Town	<input style="width: 90%;" type="text"/>
State	<input style="width: 90%;" type="text"/>
Country	<input style="width: 90%;" type="text"/>

3. If you were born outside the U.S., how old were you when you immigrated to the U.S.?

4. Your current employment status:

- ☐ Part-Time
- ☐ Full-Time
- ☐ Stay at home/unemployed by choice
- ☐ Unemployed

5. When I attended school, I received:

- ☐ Free lunch
- ☐ Reduce-priced lunch
- ☐ Neither

Socioeconomic factors that lead to Latino males leaving high school before**6. What languages were spoken in your household? (Please list all)**

1.	<input type="text"/>
2.	<input type="text"/>
3.	<input type="text"/>
4.	<input type="text"/>
5.	<input type="text"/>
6.	<input type="text"/>

7. Did you have both parents living at home while attending school?

☐ Yes

☐ No (Who did you live with?)

8. What is the highest level of education your mom has completed?

☐ Some high school

☐ High school Diploma

☐ GED

☐ Some college

☐ 2-Year Degree (vocational and technical)

☐ 4- year Degree

☐ Some graduate work

☐ Master's

☐ Doctorate

☐ Other (please explain)

Socioeconomic factors that lead to Latino males leaving high school before**9. What is the highest level of education your dad has completed?**

- ☐ Some high school
- ☐ High school Diploma
- ☐ GED
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ 2-Year Degree (vocational and technical)
- ☐ 4- year Degree
- ☐ Some graduate work
- ☐ Master's
- ☐ Doctorate
- ☐ Other (please explain)

Socioeconomic factors that lead to Latino males leaving high school before

2. School Demographics

10. How would you describe the racial background of the school staff at your last high school? (Check ALL that apply)

	Latino	White	Black	Asian	Native	Mixed	Other
Principal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guidance Counselors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. How would you describe the racial background of the student population? (Check ALL that apply)

	Latino	White	Black	Asian	Native	Mixed	Other
Students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. How would you describe your overall thoughts about the school staff?

- ☐ Positive
☐ Somewhat Positive
☐ Neutral
☐ Somewhat Negative
☐ Negative
☐ Mixed

Please Explain

Socioeconomic factors that lead to Latino males leaving high school before**13. How did the school staff treat you?**

- ☐ Respectfully
- ☐ Somewhat Respectfully
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat Disrespectfully
- ☐ Disrespectfully
- ☐ Mixed

Please Explain

14. How would you describe the classes you took in high school?

- ☐ Positive
- ☐ Somewhat Positive
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat Negative
- ☐ Negative
- ☐ Mixed

Please Explain

15. Did you feel “safe” attending school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Please Explain

Socioeconomic factors that lead to Latino males leaving high school before

3. Schooling Experiences

16. What was the last year you attended school?

17. What grade were you in when you last attended school?

☐ 8th Grade

☐ 9th Grade
(Freshman)

☐ 10th Grade
(Sophomore)

☐ 11th Grade (Junior)

☐ 12th Grade (Senior)

18. What was your attendance record?

How many absences per year?

How many tardies per year?

How many classes did you skip per
year?

Estimate

19. How many people were living in your household when you last attended school?

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5

☐ 6

☐ 7

☐ 8

☐ 9

☐ 10

☐ >10

☐ Changed Often [Please list the people in the space provided below (i.e. brother, sister, cousin, etc.)]

20. Did you participate in sports or extracurricular activities in school?

☐ No

☐ Yes (Please List)

21. Did you work when you attended school?

☐ No

☐ Yes (Where, What did you do, and How many hours a week?)

Socioeconomic factors that lead to Latino males leaving high school before**4. Gang and Drug Pressures**

For your protection and mine, please do not list any specific information about what gang you are/have been involved with or about any illegal activities you are/have been/will be involved in.

22. Did you ever feel pressure to try drugs?

☐ No

☐ Yes (Please describe that pressure and where it came from)

23. Did you ever use drugs?

☐ No

☐ Yes (Please explain how old you were and why you made that choice)

24. Did you ever feel pressure to join a gang?

☐ No

☐ Yes (Please describe that pressure and where it came from)

25. Did you ever join a gang?

☐ No

☐ Yes (Please explain how old you were and why you made that choice)

Socioeconomic factors that lead to Latino males leaving high school before**5. Conclusions**

26. What are your family's views about education? (Please explain)

27. What did your family say/do when you left school? (Please explain)

28. How did the school staff and classmates at your school react when you decide to leave school? (Please explain)

29. Describe your reasons for leaving school? For example, financial (responsibilities/lack of money), social (peer pressure, gangs, relationship, parenthood), academic (grades,school environment) cultural (expectations, family needs), other.

30. Do you feel that leaving school before you graduated high school will affect your future?

☐ No

☐ Yes

Please explain why or why not

Socioeconomic factors that lead to Latino males leaving high school before

31. Would you be interested in participating in a one on one interview in person or by phone? (Interviews last 30-90 minutes) If yes, please use the information below to contact me to set up an appointment.

Thank you for your participation in the study! I truly appreciate your time and input.

Sincerely,

Joe D'Agostino

jcdagostino@alaska.edu

(202)642-6665

University of Alaska Fairbanks Masters Candidate

☐ Yes

☐ No

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

- 1) Can you tell me about yourself?
 - a. How old are you?
 - b. Where were you born?
 - c. Where did you grow up/live?
- 2) How about your family?
 - a. How many people are in your family?
 - b. Where were your parents born?
 - c. What is your parents' highest level of education?
- 3) What do your parents do for a living?
- 4) How would you describe the community you lived in during your high school years?
 - a. Was it the same community during your elementary and middle school years?
- 5) What was your high school like?
 - a. What was the racial & ethnic makeup of the students? The school personnel (teachers, counselors, staff, principal, etc.)?
- 6) Can you tell me about your school experience?
 - b. Did you participate in any extracurricular activities? Why? Why not? What were they?
 - c. What kinds of classes did you take in elementary, middle/junior high, and high school?
- 7) What was your favorite aspect of high school? Why?
- 8) What was your least favorite aspect of high school? Why?
- 9) How did the school administrators (principal, etc...), staff, and teachers treat you compared to the other students at the school?
- 10) What were some reasons that led you to leave school early? For example, family teachers/administrators, peers, curriculum (e.g. what you were learning and taking in school), etc...
- 11) Was there one event that finalized your decision to leave school?
- 12) What did your family say/do when you left school?
- 13) When and why did you decided to join a gang?
 - d. Did that decision affect your ability to finish high school?
 - e. If so, to what extent and why?
- 14) If you could change one thing in your former high school, what would that be?
- 15) How could the school, your family and/or community help you to stay in school?
 - f. What are some things that they could have done?
- 16) What do you think your life would be like if you completed high school?
- 17) If there was one piece of advice you would give a Latino male of high school age, what would it be?
- 18) How was this interview experience for you?

Appendix 3: IRB Approval



(907) 474-7800
 (907) 474-5444 fax
 fyirb@uaf.edu
 www.uaf.edu/irb

Institutional Review Board

909 N Koyukuk Dr. Suite 212, P.O. Box 757270, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-7270

October 17, 2011

To: Nga-Wing Anjela Wong, Ph.D.
 Principal Investigator

From: University of Alaska Fairbanks IRB

Re: [274433-3] Socioeconomic factors that lead to Latino male students leaving high school before graduating

Thank you for submitting the Revision referenced below. The submission was handled by Expedited Review under the requirements of 45 CFR 46.110, which identifies the categories of research eligible for expedited review.

Title:	Socioeconomic factors that lead to Latino male students leaving high school before graduating
Received:	October 17, 2011
Expedited Category:	7
Action:	APPROVED
Effective Date:	October 17, 2011
Expiration Date:	October 17, 2012

Required Information:

A personnel list was added and data storage issues were corrected on the protocol as per the reviewer's request.

This action is included on the November 17, 2011 IRB Agenda.

No changes may be made to this project without the prior review and approval of the IRB. This includes, but is not limited to, changes in research scope, research tools, consent documents, personnel, or record storage location.

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